Dorothy Morris

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EDITION DE LUXE

The Works of

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

VOLUME IX

ILLUSTRATED

FORT COMME LA MORT

AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

FLORENCE CREWE-JONES

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Fort Comme la Mort

(AS STRONG AS DEATH)

THE large studio was flooded with the glorious mellow light of the closing day. Through the opened bay window a ray of sunbeams entered and softly touched the silken draperies with golden lights, lingered lovingly on them for a while, then gradually grew fainter and fainter and gently faded away in the heavy portieres, scarcely deigning to lighten the gloomy corners, where alone the gold frames of the pictures stood out glitteringly. Peace and quietness seemed imprisoned within the studio, the peace of an artist's home where a human soul has worked. In this room thoughts had lived,— thoughts had been aroused, stirred, spent, and exhausted in strenuous efforts, but now all is soothed, abated and quiet once more. Peace pervaded everywhere. The very furniture, draperies, and great personages whose portraits were unfinished on the canvases, all seemed to repose. It was as if the whole studio had labored in unison with the master painter, struggling with him, and taking part every day in his ceaseless efforts and then were sympathizing with him in his utter weariness and fatigue. A vague odor of paints and turpentine, emanating from the divans and rugs, filled the room. The

silence was broken only by the quick, short cry of the swallows, as they flew past the open window, and the long confused murmur of Paris, scarcely audible above the roof tops. Nothing moved but the intermittent clouds and rings of gray smoke as they curled their way upwards to the ceiling, after each puff of the cigarette that Olivier Bertin, as he lay stretched out on the sofa, blew out from between his lips.

Absently watching the zig-zag flight of birds, as they rapidly passed across the azure blue of the heavens, the artist was meditating upon the subject for a new picture. What should he paint? Up to the present moment he had formed no idea whatever, besides, he was not a man of resolution, he was not quite sure of himself, he had a restless disposition, so that undefined inspirations would waver unceasingly between all the manifestations of art. Rich, eminent, having gained all possible honors, he was now living towards the end of his life, a man who did not yet know what ideal he had pursued. He had taken the prix de Rome, was a supporter of traditions, evocator after so many others of the great historical scenes; then, modernizing his tendencies, he had painted men of the day with classic recollections. Intelligent, enthusiastic, a tenacious worker with ever-changing ideals, devoted to his art, which he knew to perfection, he had acquired, thanks to his fineness of sentiment, some superb qualities of a remarkable execution, and a great facility of talent born partly from his indecisions, and partly from the varied temptations which had beset his life. Perhaps the quick acceptance of the world for his exquisite paintings which were so distinguished and correct in every detail, had helped in a great measure to influence

his nature, in opposing his character to that which it would have normally become. Since the triumph of his debut, the desire to please continually stirred within him, although he was scarcely aware of it, and it secretly modified his way and extenuated his convictions. This wish to please appeared in every form and contributed greatly to his glory.

The charm of his manners, the habits of his life, the care which he bestowed upon his person, his reputation for strength and skill as a swordsman and equestrian, made a trail of small notorieties to his growing celebrity. After exhibiting his picture of *Cleopatra,* the first ancient subject he had painted, Paris had adopted him and fêted him,— had made him its idol, and he had suddenly become one of the brilliant, fashionable artists that one meets in the Bois, at the smart gatherings, in the drawing-room of the *grandes dames.* He had been received by the Institute, he had entered it triumphantly with the approbation of the whole city. Dame Fortune had thus led him on caressing and honoring him until the approach of his old age.

To-day, under the influence of the glowing sunset which seemed to throw its lustrous mantle over everything, he was seeking for a poetic subject for his new painting. Feeling a little indolent from the after effects of his luncheon and cigarette he mused over his embryo picture. Gazing into the sky above, he sketched in the azure blue the outlines of the figures,— graceful women walking through leafy woods, or a maiden strolling along a picturesque road — lovers sitting on the flowery banks of a river, all the vivid imaginations which delighted his thoughts. The variable figures

were ethereally drawn in the sky above him — vague and changeable in the colored hallucination of his eye; and then the flight of swallows in their incessant volatile motion crossed his horizon of blue, and blotted out his figures, swept across the background of his picture as though they were darts of arrows piercing the graceful forms of his artistic dream.

All the figures that he saw in the sky, seemed to resemble someone he had already painted, all the women were the sisters or daughters of those who had been brought forth by his artistic caprices, and the confused fear which had greatly possessed him the last year, the fear seized him that he had exhausted his ideas, that he had made the round of his subjects and drained his inspirations. Before this review of his work, the impotence to dream of something new, to discover something from the unknown held him in its grasp. He got up dejectedly and looked among the unfinished sketches in his portfolio, to see if he could find something that would awaken an idea. Puffing at his cigarette all the time, he commenced to look over the sketches, drawings and paintings which he kept stowed away in an old carved press; then, thoroughly dejected and disgusted with his vain search, he pushed them all back into their places. Throwing away his cigarette he whistled a popular street air, and, stooping down, he picked up the heavy dumb-bells which were on the floor at his feet, and with the other hand lifted aside the drapery hanging in front of the huge mirror, which served him to control the correctness of his poise, and to verify the perspectives; then, placing himself vis-à-vis the mirror, he commenced going through his exer-

cises. He had been celebrated throughout the studios for his strength, and in society for his physique and manners, but now that age had come upon him, it brought its accompanying avoirdupois. Tall, broad-shouldered and full chested, he now had developed muscles that would have done credit to a retired wrestler. To keep in form he practiced fencing every day and went horse-back riding with assiduity. He still had a remarkably fine head, it was as shapely as in the days of his youth, although his hair was snow white,— white, short and thick; it presented a striking contrast to his piercing black eyes, under the thick eyebrows. His drooping mustache — the mustache of an old soldier,— was still black and gave to his face a rare character of energy and pride. Standing before his mirror with heels together and body held erect he went through all the dumb-bell exercises, with the heavy weights held out at the length of his muscular arms — noting the powerful and easy efforts, he followed his movements with a complacent look. Suddenly in the mirror which reflected the entire studio, he saw a portiere gently move, then a woman's head appeared — only the head was visible — a voice behind him called out:

"Any one at home?"

"Yes! I am here," he replied turning round. Then placing the weights on the floor, he ran towards the door with an agility that was slightly forced.

A woman in an elaborate light gown entered. "You were just exercising?" she remarked as they shook hands.

"Yes!" he said laughingly, "I was showing off like a peacock and you surprised me in the act."

"The *concierge* was not there," she said, "and as I know you are always alone at this hour, I thought I would come up without being announced."

He looked at her.

"*Bigre!* How beautiful you are, and how chic."

"Yes! This is a new dress, how do you like it? Tell me if you don't think it is very pretty."

"It is charming. An exquisite harmony; the blending of the colors is perfect. We can truthfully say that this glorious afternoon typifies the sentiment of shades."

He turned her round and about, felt the material of her gown, altered with a slight touch of the finger the placing of a fold, as a man who understands the artistic arrangement of a woman's toilet, as thoroughly as a dressmaker. He finished by declaring:

"It is a great success, and suits you beautifully."

She let him admire her, perfectly contented and happy to be thought pretty and to please him. She was no longer young, although still beautiful; of medium height and perfect figure, she radiated with the refulgence which gives to a woman of forty years the charm of maturity. She looked like a beautiful rose that would expand indefinitely until full blown, then fade and wither in an hour. She had the grace and charm of a *Parisienne* who cannot grow old, who is full of life and vivacity, who is imbued with an inexhaustible provision of resistance and who for twenty years would remain the same — triumphant and indestructible, caring above all for her beauty, grace and health.

"*Eh bien* and are we not going to kiss to-day," she murmured as she raised her veil.

"I have been smoking," he replied.

"Puh!" she said, making a little grimace, and holding up her lips to him. "Just as though that mattered. I don't care."

He bent his head and kissed her on the mouth, then took her parasol and helped her off with her lace jacket with quick, sure movements showing that he was habituated to this little attention. When she was seated on the sofa beside him, he asked with a slight show of interest:

"How is your husband to-day?"

"Oh! he is very well, thanks. At this very moment I expect he is speaking at the Chamber of Deputies."

"Upon what?" he asked.

"Without the shadow of a doubt on beet-roots, or oil of colza, as he is always doing."

The Count de Guilleroy, her husband, was deputy for the department of Eure, and made a speciality of all agricultural questions.

Seeing a sketch on the easel that she did not know she walked over to it asking:

"What is this, dear?"

"That is a pastel I have just commenced,— a portrait of the Princess de Pontêve," he replied.

"You know," she said turning round to him and speaking very seriously, "if you intend to again take up painting portraits of women I shall close your studio. I know what that sort of thing leads to."

"But," he said, "one does not paint twice in a lifetime a portrait of Any."

"I should hope not."

She looked at the picture with the air of a critic, she stood a little way from the easel, then approached,

made a shade with her hands and placed the canvas in a position where the light would best fall upon it. Then she turned to him and said with genuine admiration:

"It is splendid. You are decidedly strong at pastels."

"You think so?" he replied, pleased with the compliment.

"Indeed I do," she said, "it is such a delicate art, and one in which must be shown a great deal of distinction. No ameteur can possibly go in for that sort of thing."

For the last twelve years since the beginning of her acquaintance with the artist, her inclinations towards the highest of arts had been accentuated, probably on account of her social amenities. She was gently pushing her tendencies towards an ideal which was slightly affected and artificial.

"What is the Princess like?" she asked suddenly.

He gave her all the minute details, which the jealous and subtle curiosity of a woman exacted; but he showed diplomacy in this cross questioning, he passed lightly and indifferently over the personal charm and character of the Princess, but gave exact descriptions of her *toilettes* and jewels.

"Does she try to flirt with you?" she asked abruptly.

The artist laughed outright and declared most emphatically that she did not.

She turned to him and, placing her two hands on his shoulders, she looked at him fixedly. The violet pupils of her eyes, flecked with imperceptible black points like splashes of ink, vibrated strangely under the intensity of her gaze.

"Tell me, on your honor, is she not a coquette?"

"On my honor, she is not," he replied.

"But even if she were," she added, "there is no occasion for me to worry. You will never love anyone beside me now. All is finished,— for others. It is now too late for you, my poor friend."

He felt the light, though painful touch which grazes the heart of the elderly man when his age is referred to, but he said softly:

"Any, to-day, to-morrow, the same as yesterday, there has never, and will never be anyone in my life but you."

She slipped her arm through his and turning towards the sofa she drew him down beside her.

"Of what have you been thinking to-day?" she asked.

"About my new picture. I want a subject."

"Upon what?"

"That is just what I do not know. Otherwise, I should not be seeking for inspirations."

"What have you been doing, since I last saw you?" she questioned.

He told her about the visits he had received, the dinners and *soirées* he had attended, etc., etc.

They chatted upon all the frivolous and familiar subject relating to their worldly existence,— the little rivalries, the intrigues, the *liaisons* which they knew of or suspected, the judgments which had been pronounced upon the culprits and the chances which might carry them by, or suck them down in the troubled whirlpool which lay beneath their brilliant Parisian life.

They knew everyone who was anyone, he, as an artist before whom all doors opened, she, as a social leader

and the wife of a conservative deputy. They were both past-masters in the art of worldly French conversation; they were exercised in that ordinary, amiable, half spiteful chatter, which is uselessly witty, and vulgarly distinguished, and which gives a smart and particularly enviable reputation to those who are gifted with such a flexible, smooth tongue.

"When are you going to dine with us?" she asked presently.

"When you like, you have only to name the day," he replied.

"Let it be Friday, then. I shall have the Duchess de Mortemain, the Corbelles, and Musadieu to celebrate my daughter's return; she is coming home tonight, but you must not say a word about it, because I want to keep it a secret."

"Very good. I will remember. I shall be glad to see Annette again, I have not seen her for three years."

"That is true. It is just three years ago."

Little Annette at first had lived with her parents in Paris, but she had now become the last and passionate affection of her grandmother — Madame Paradin. The old lady who was almost blind now, had taken up her residence on her son-in-law's country estate,— the Château de Roncières in the department of the Eure. Each visit that Annette had made to her grandmother had become of longer duration, and finally she had kept the child with her altogether. It was easy for the parents to see that the quiet and free life of the country was far better for the little one than the cramped city life, and as they passed six months in the capital and six months in the Eure, where agricultural and electrical interests drew the Count, it was amicably ar-

ranged that only on rare occasions should she be brought to Paris. During the last three years she had not once visited the city, for now that she was finishing her education, the Countess preferred to keep her away altogether, not wishing that she should develop tastes, opinions and ideas on social life, until the time arrived for her to make her debut.

The Countess had engaged two governesses with the highest diplomas, and had installed them at the Château with her mother and daughter and, as she supervised the education of Annette, her visits to the country were very frequent. Olivier Bertin had spent two or three months every summer at Roncières, but during the last few years, he had suffered from severe attacks of rheumatism, so had been obliged to pass the season at the health resorts to take the waters. The long *séjour* at the springs redoubled his love for Paris, so that once back in his studio, he had very little desire to leave it again.

According to previous arrangements, Annette was not to come home until the following autumn, but her father had suddenly conceived a project of marriage for her, so she was immediately sent for in order to meet her fiancé — the Marquis de Farandal. It had all been kept very secret and only Olivier Bertin had been taken into the confidence of Madame de Guilleroy.

"Then this project of your husband's for Annette's future has been agreed upon," he asked.

"Yes! and we consider in a very satisfactory manner," she replied.

Then they again discussed the subject for the picture. She asked him to paint a Christ, but he raised strong objections, saying that he thought there had already

been enough painted, but she insisted and tried hard to induce him to consent.

"Oh!" she cried impatiently, "I know how to draw, and I'll tell you exactly how I think it should be. It should be the crucifixion of Christ, they are in the act of taking Him down from the cross, and the man who detaches the hands lets the body slip. It falls, and drops upon the crowd of people below, who stretch out eager arms to receive and support it. Do you see it? Do you understand me?"

Yes! he understood, in fact he found the conception altogether original, but his wish was to paint something modern, something entirely up to date. Looking at his friend as she reclined stretched out on the divan and noting her foot encased in a perfect shoe and silk stocking, through the sheer fabric of which a glimpse of flesh could be seen, he cried out:

"I have it. This is what I will paint. This is life — *only* a woman's foot peeping out from beneath her dress, but one can inculcate everything therein — the truth, the desire, the poetry. Nothing is prettier or more charming than a woman's foot, and then what mystery it suggests. The limb beneath the gown is hidden from view, and yet we can divine it."

Seated on the floor beside the divan, with his feet drawn up à la Turk, he took her foot in his hand and gently pulled off the shoe, and the foot, being freed from the casing, writhed and wriggled like a little restless caged animal, surprised at finding itself free.

"Now, tell me," he said, "is it not dainty and suggestive? It is far more suggestive than the hand."

"Show me your hand, Any."

She wore long kid gloves reaching up to the elbow.

He took her foot in his hand and gently pulled off the shoe.

Taking the top of the glove she drew it with a quick, sliding movement from her arm, turning it in the manner that one would peel off the skin of a snake.

He looked at her white arm, so rapidly undressed that it gave rise to the thought of a perfect and bold nudity. She held out her hand to him letting it bend slightly from the wrist. The diamond rings glittered on her slim fingers, and the pink nails delicately filed looked like amorous claws growing at the end of a tiny paw.

Olivier Bertin softly caressed it in admiration; he moved and turned the fingers about as though they were flesh playthings.

"How strange it is," he said musingly, "that these tiny members can do so much, they are so intelligent and adroit, they can do anything, make lace, books, houses, pyramids, locomotives, cooking, or caresses — caressing is what they most excel in." He pulled off her rings one by one and when it came to the turn of her wedding ring, the plain circle of gold, he smilingly looked into her eyes, and murmured as he touched it: "*The Law.* Let us salute it."

"Fool," she cried, turning from him coldly.

He always seemed to wish to joke, he had the tendency that the French have of mingling a semblance of irony with the most serious subjects and often he saddened her without intending to do so, without realizing the subtle distinctions of women or discerning the limits of the sacred liens.

She felt it deeply when he spoke of their relationship, in a tone of teasing familiarity; their *liaison* had been of such long duration that he declared it was the best example of love that could be found in the nineteenth century.

"You will take Annette and me to the *Vernissage,* will you not?" she said, quietly changing the subject.

"Why, of course," he replied. Then she questioned him on the best paintings that would be hung at the next *Salon,* the opening of which would take place in fifteen days. Suddenly, as if remembering an engagement, she said:

"Come along, give me back my shoe, I must go now."

He played absently with the dainty shoe, turning it over and over in his hands. He bent forward and kissed her foot as it hung limply between the hem of her gown and the carpet. It no longer twisted and writhed, it had grown chilled through being uncovered, so he gently pulled the shoe over it. Madame de Guilleroy got up and walked over to the table which was covered with papers and opened letters, some of which were old, some recent. She looked curiously at the *mélange,* touched some of the papers and lifted them to see what was underneath.

"So you are going to disorder my disorder?" he said as he came behind her.

Without replying or looking up she asked:

"Who is the man who wants to buy your picture — 'The Bathers.'"

"An American, whom I do not know," he replied.

"Have you yet consented to sell 'The Street Singers?'"

"Yes. It is sold for ten thousand francs."

"You have done very well with it, it was very nice, but really nothing exceptional. Good-bye, dear."

She held her cheek to him which he brushed with a light kiss.

Then she disappeared behind the portieres, saying as she went:

"Remember, Friday at eight o'clock. No! I do not wish you to escort me. You know that very well. *Au revoir.*"

When she had gone, he lit a cigarette and commenced to walk slowly up and down his studio. He was thinking. He recalled the beginning of their acquaintance, his thoughts went back many years; incidents of long ago came back to his memory, he recalled others and fastened them together, making a chain of interesting souvenirs.

It had commenced at a time when he was beginning to shine as a star on the horizon of Paris, when painters were monopolizing all the favor of the public, when they moved into the richest quarters and dwelt in magnificent houses which they gained with a few strokes of the brush. After he returned from Rome, in 1864, he had lived for a few years without success, without note, then, in 1868, he exhibited his *Cleopatra,* and suddenly all was changed. Everyone was talking of his work, he was extolled to the skies, both by the critics and by the public. In 1872, after the war, after the death of Henri Regnault had made for all his colleagues a sort of pedestal of glory, he painted a bold subject, a "*Jocaste*" which classed him among the most daring painters of the epoch. Although this achievement was judiciously original, it was at the same time approved of by the academies. In 1873, the highest medal placed him *hors concours* with his "*Jewess of Algiers*" which he painted after his return from a voyage in Africa, then a portrait of the Princess de Salia, in 1874, gave him the distinction of being the best portrait painter of

the day. From then on he became the idolized painter of the *Parisienne* and the *Parisiennes;* he interpreted in the most ingenious and skillful manner their grace, their charm, and their character. In a few months all the women who formed the élite of the French aristocracy, solicited the favor of being portrayed by him. He did not accede to all requests, and those whom he did paint, he made pay an exorbitant price.

Then, when he had become society's pet artist, he saw one day at the home of the Duchess de Mortemain a young woman in deep mourning, who was leaving the house as he entered. He was dazzled with a lovely vision of grace and charm. He inquired her name and learnt that she was the Countess de Guilleroy, wife of a Normandy squire,— an agriculturist, and deputy for the domain; that she was in mourning for her father-in-law; that she was clever, witty, very much admired and greatly sought after. Moved by the vision that had charmed his artistic eye, he exclaimed: "Ah! there is a woman whose portrait I would willingly paint."

The next day his words were repeated to the Countess, and he received the same evening a dainty blue tinted note written in an aristocratic, fine handwriting which read:

Monsieur:

The Duchess de Mortemain has just called upon me, and informed me that you would be willing to make one of your masterpieces with my poor face. I would trust it to you with pleasure, if I were sure you had not spoken at random, and that you saw in me some-

thing that could be reproduced and idealized by you.

Believe, *Monsieur,* in my distinguished sentiments.

ANNE DE GUILLEROY.

He replied by asking when he might call upon her, and was invited without ceremony to take luncheon with the Count and Countess on the following Monday. They lived on the first *étage* of a large and luxurious house on the Boulevard Malesherbes. After walking through the lofty *salon* hung with blue silk, he was shown into a sort of boudoir hung with pale tapestries of the last century,— Watteau tapestries in the most delicate tones and shadings. The charming subjects seemed as though they were made, designed, and executed by workers dreaming of love. The Countess soon appeared. She walked so lightly that he had not heard her coming through the outer room, and he was surprised to see her beside him. She held out her hand to him cordially, and said as though they were old friends:

" Well, then it is true, you really would like to paint my portrait? "

" I shall be most happy to do so, Madame," he replied, bending over her hand in a courteous manner.

Her straight black gown made her look very slim, and gave her a youthful, girlish look, but the sombre color seemed out of keeping with her sunny, smiling face, framed in the heavy masses of blonde hair. The Count entered holding by the hand a little girl of six years. Madame de Guilleroy presented him.

" My husband," she said simply.

He was a man of short stature, without mustache: his hollow cheeks were darkly tinted under the skin

from his shaved beard, two long lines stretched from his high cheek bones to his chin. His hair was brushed flatly back from his forehead, which gave him the look of a priest or an actor. His manners were polished in the extreme. He thanked the painter with a superfluity of smooth phrases which bespoke the orator. Yes! for a long time he had wanted his wife's portrait painted, and certainly it was Mr. Olivier Bertin whom he would have chosen if he had not feared a refusal, for he knew how greatly he was besieged with requests. It was understood with a great deal of politeness on the part of both men, that Madame should be escorted to the studio by her husband on the following day. Although, he suggested, would it not be better, as she was wearing deep mourning, to wait a little while; but the painter declared that he wished to interpret the first impression he had received, he wanted to seize the contrast of the severe and sombre coloring of her garments, against her face so full of life and delicacy of feature, and radiant beneath the halo of golden hair. So the next day she went with her husband and the following days with her little girl whom they sat before a table piled high with picture books.

Olivier Bertin, according to his custom, was very reserved. These women of the world disturbed his serenity, because he scarcely understood them. He imagined them to be all *blasé,* frivolous, hypocritical and dangerous. He had had many adventures with the *demi-mondaines* — adventures that were due solely to his celebrity, his gay nature, his physique and athletic form. He liked the women of the half-world, he was one with them, he enjoyed the free habits, the broad talk, the amusing and gay company of the studios, and

green-rooms, which he frequented. He only belonged to the society world for the glory, not for any sentiment; there his pride was gratified, there he received congratulations and orders, there he paraded before the beautiful women who complimented and flattered him, but to whom he never made love. He did not permit himself any bold pleasantry or spicy wit before them, and so he passed for having *bon ton.* Each time that one of them came to see him, he had felt, despite the advances which she had made to please him, the disparity of caste, that caste which even though they meet frequently, opposes the mingling of the Bohemian artist and the society woman. Behind the admiration and the smile which, with women, is always a little artificial, he divined the obscure mental reserve of a being who judged herself of a superior quality. These observations resulted in his showing a little more pride, his manners were almost haughty, his conversation a shade more respectful. And so, side by side, with the dissimulated vanity of a *parvenu* treated on terms of equality with the *noblesse,* was the pride of a man who owes to his talent an analogous position — a position which, to those with whom he associated, was due them by their birth. They spoke of him with slight surprise. "How very well bred" they remarked. This surprise, although it flattered his vanity, at the same time offended his pride, for it indicated a difference.

The painter's intentional and ceremonious gravity slightly embarrassed Madame de Guilleroy. She could find nothing to say to this man who was so reserved and cold, and had the reputation for being so clever.

After having placed her little daughter at the table,

she seated herself in a lounge chair near to the easel upon which stood the picture already in progress. She attempted to give the right expression to her physiognomy according to the artist's directions.

In the middle of the fourth sitting he stopped and said abruptly:

"What amuses you most in your life, Madame?"

She looked at him in embarrassment. "I don't know," she answered. "Why do you ask me that question?"

"I want to get a *happy* look in your eyes, I have not seen one yet."

"Well, then, make me talk a little," she said, smiling up at him. "I love talking."

"Are you gay then?"

"Yes! very gay."

"Let us talk then, Madame."

He made the remark "Let us talk then" in his most serious manner, and then commenced to paint again. And so they chatted on various subjects, he trying to find a theme which would be of mutual interest.

They commenced by exchanging their observations on people whom they both knew. Then they spoke of themselves, which is the most interesting and agreeable topic for a tête-à-tête chat.

When they met the next day they were far more at their ease, and Bertin, seeing that he pleased and amused her, told her the details of his artist life, and related his adventures in the gay and witty manner which was characteristic of him. Accustomed to the polished brilliancy of the men of letters she met in the drawing-rooms of her friends, she was surprised and delighted at his droll and animated chatter, which came

as a distinct surprise after his former aloofness. His amusing talk sparkled with irony, and found expression so ingenuously, that she soon found herself replying in the same tone, in a daring although refined manner. In eight days she was conquered and bewitched by his good humor, his frankness, and his utter simplicity; and he, on the other hand, had altogether forgotten his prejudices against *les élegantes* and would have willingly affirmed that they alone, possessed real fascination and charm. Standing before his canvas, painting all the time, sometimes advancing, sometimes receding in his work with the movement of an artist who is combating, he would speak out his thoughts, his hopes, and ambitions to the pretty blonde and black woman who sat before him, as though he had known her all his life. *Blonde and black* — she looked as though she typified sunshine and grief; she laughed so much as she listened to him, and replied with such animation, that she lost her pose at every moment.

He would suddenly move away from his easel and stand looking at her with his head held sideways, and eyes half closed; then he would come quite near to her, to note the slightest shades of her face, the fleeting expressions, and he would seize and render that which is, in a woman's face, far more than the visible appearance — the emanation of ideal beauty,— the reflection of *something* which one feels but does not know, the intimate and redoubtable grace characteristic to each one, which makes one in particular loved passionately by someone, but not by another.

One afternoon the little girl came and stood before the canvas; for a moment or so she was silent, then she looked up at the artist with serious eyes and said:

"That is just like my mamma." He took her up in his arms and kissed her: he was flattered by the naive homage to the resemblance of his work. Another day, when she was sitting quietly at the table with her picture books, she looked up suddenly and said in a sad little voice: "Oh! mamma, I am *so* tired of being here." The painter was so touched by the child's first complaint that the next day he had sent up to the studio a quantity of beautiful toys. The little Annette was amazed at the sight of such a grand display, and at once began contentedly and with infinite care and thought to put them in order, so as to be able to play with them, one after another just as the fancy would seize her. From that day she loved the artist as a child can love, with that sweet, caressing confidence and trust which makes them so adorable.

Madame de Guilleroy enjoyed the visits to the studio; on account of the death of her father-in-law, she was unable to go into society this winter, so, as the gayety of the Paris social whirl was denied her, all the pleasure of her life was found in the studio.

Daughter of a rich French merchant who had been dead several years and of a mother who was a confirmed invalid, and whose health laid her on a sick bed six months out of the twelve, she had become, when quite a young girl, an experienced housekeeper, a perfect hostess, and possessed a *savoir faire* that is rarely found in a girl of tender years. She performed the honors of her parents' home and used the greatest discrimination in the selection of their guests, she knew how to smile, talk, and had that exquisite tact which put all with whom she came in contact at their ease.

When her father introduced the Count de Guilleroy to her as her future husband, she understood at once what advantages such a marriage would bring, and frankly admitted them. She thought the matter over calmly, and taking all into consideration, she argued in a philosophical manner that one could not have everything, and that there was the good and the bad in every situation in life. Once launched in society she was sought after by all, for she was pretty and clever. She met many men who tried to win her favor, but not once did she lose her calm serenity. The compliments they paid her flattered her, the passions she aroused amused her — that is, so long as she was able to ignore them, and when she passed a *soirée* surrounded by the homage and admiration of all the men, she felt like a woman who had accomplished her mission on this earth. She had led this existence for seven years without being bored, without appearing to find the life monotonous. The incessant excitement of the social whirl, the men of her retinue — politicians, financiers, or the idle aristocracy, amused her as actors on a stage, therefore she did not take them too seriously.

The painter pleased her, at first because he was so different from the rest. She was happy at the studio, it was so amusing, she laughed gayly, was high spirited; and then he pleased her because he was handsome, strong and celebrated. No women, even though they may pretend to be, are entirely indifferent to physical assets and fame. She was flattered to have inspired in this connoisseur of woman's beauty a desire to paint her, he was an artist who was so difficult to please. She discovered in him an active and cultivated

delicacy of imagination, a fund of intelligence, and a colored *fantaisie* which seemed to enhance her most trivial comments.

A rapid intimacy grew up between them, and the warm hand shake which they gave when meeting seemed each day to mingle something of the sentiments of their hearts. Then, without serious thought, without premeditating and wrong doing, she felt grow within her the natural desire to tempt him, and to be loved by him. She had not taken advantage of their intercourse, she had contrived nothing, she was merely a coquette, displaying more charm, as a woman instinctively does towards the man who pleases her above all others. So she showed him in all her ways, looks and smiles that gleam of seduction which envelopes a woman whose soul is awakened to the need of being loved. She said flattering things to him, which signified clearly that she liked him, and she encouraged him to talk of himself, listening with great attention to show how much he interested her.

He would stop painting to sit down beside her, and in the emotion which was born of the desire to please her, he had moods of poetry, of gayety, of philosophy, according to the moment. She was amused when he was gay, when he was thoughtful she tried to follow him in the development of his thoughts, although not always succeeding, but, even when she was thinking of something else, she had a knack of appearing to listen with rapt attention, and an air of having so well understood him, that he dreamed on, exalted and stirred to the depths of his nature to think that, at last, he had found one upon whom his thoughts could fall, like grains on a fertile soil.

The portrait progressed and was strikingly true, the painter had now arrived at that state of emotion necessary to discover all the qualities of his model, and to express them with that convincing ardor which is the inspiration of all true artists. Leaning towards her to note the expression of her face, the coloring of her flesh, the shading of her skin, the glance and the limpidity of her eyes, all the secrets of her physiognomy, he was impregnated with her like a sponge that is soaked with water,— he transported to his canvas this emanation of abashed charm which the intensity of his look had brought forth, and as it flowed like a wave from his thoughts to his brush, he became stupefied and intoxicated drinking in thirstily the grace of the woman. She knew that she bewitched him, she was quite happy, it was such a fascinating game she was playing, so she went on gayly making her victory more and more sure. She felt the animation herself, there came to her an emotion she had not known before, which gave her life a new flavor and awoke in her a mysterious joy. When she heard him spoken of by her friends, her heart would beat quickly, she wished to cry out, it was one of those wishes that are never expressed by the lips in words, had she given it verbal expression she would have cried: "He loves me! He loves me!" She was glad when they praised his talent, and perhaps, woman-like, she was still more glad when they praised his looks. When she was alone in her room thinking of him, she felt that she had really made a firm friend, one who would always remain contented with merely a cordial handshake. Very often, in the middle of a sitting, he would put down his palette and brush brusquely, and taking

little Annette in his arms would tenderly kiss her eyes, and her hair while looking at the mother as though to say: "It is you, not the little one, that I am caressing."

On some occasions Madame de Guilleroy did not bring the child, she came alone to the studio, and on those days no work was done, but they talked to advantage.

One afternoon she was late. It was towards the end of February, the day was intensely cold. Bertin had come in early, as he always did the day he was expecting her, for he hoped that she might arrive before the hour fixed for the sitting. He waited for her, walking with long strides up and down the room smoking his cigarette. He asked himself again for the hundredth time in the last few days: "Is this love?" He did not know, for he had not felt the true sentiment before. He had had many infatuations, some had passed quickly, others had lasted several months, but he knew that they were *only* infatuations — not love. To-day he was amazed at the strength of the emotion he felt. Did he love her? He had never thought of the possibility of possessing her. Up to now almost as soon as a woman attracted him desire had encroached upon his sentiments, making him hold out his arms to her as though to gather a fruit, desire had come, even before his intimate thoughts had been ever deeply moved by her presence or by her absence. But the wish to possess this woman had scarcely awakened, it seemed shadowed and hidden behind a sentiment far more powerful.

Olivier Bertin had always thought that love began by dreaming, by poetic ecstasies, but this agitation he was now feeling was quite the contrary, it was an in-

definable emotion which seemed to him to bear far more a physical status than a moral. He was nervous, excited and anxious, as one is when a malady is germinating within one, although, after carefully analyzing his feelings, he admitted there was nothing sad or painful which thus excited his blood to fever point. He did not deceive himself. He knew that Madame de Guilleroy was the cause, and that, when he saw her again, his anguish would be redoubled. It was not that he felt drawn to her by a transport of all his being, but he felt that she was ever present, though invisible to his eyes,— her soul was near to him always. When she left him she seemed to have left with him some subtle and inexpressible part of herself. What was it? Was it love? He pondered on trying to fathom the depths, so as to see and understand what it all meant. He found her charming, but she was not the ideal woman that his imagination had created; but why did he think of her so,— why did he think of her more than other society women whose portrait he had painted? Why did he think of her incessantly, and in a different way than of them all?

Had he blindly fallen into the trap which an accomplished coquette set for him, which from the beginning of their acquaintance he had scented and fully understood, and being circumvented by her maneuvers, was he going to submit to a fascination which the women who are determined to attract the opposite sex, possess?

He walked nervously backwards and forwards in his apartment, then for a while he tried to sit down quietly, he lit a cigarette but threw it away as soon as it was alight; every moment he looked at the clock

whose hand was going towards the hour in a slow and immutable manner. Several times he had felt inclined to throw off the arched glass case with a quick jerk of his nail, and push the two golden needles that pointed to the hour which he was awaiting so impatiently, roughly forward. It seemed to his fevered imagination that that would be quite sufficient for the door to open and for her to appear on the threshold before him — deceived and forced to come to him by his cunning ruse. Then he smiled to think how absurdly childish and unreasonable he had become.

Then for the first time he asked himself plainly the question: "Could I ever become her lover?" The idea appeared to him singular, not possible to be realized, scarcely possible to pursue, on account of the complications which would then be brought into her life; and yet she attracted him so much! "Decidedly, I am in a strange fix," he concluded as the clock struck the hour which made him tremble and disturbed his senses more than his soul. He awaited her with an impatience that increased every minute; she was always so punctual, why was she late to-day? When ten minutes more had passed he was tormented by a feeling of keen pain, and then annoyed to think that she was making him waste his time; then he looked the situation in the face and knew that he was going to suffer, and suffer cruelly. What should he do? Should he wait for her? No! He would go out, so that if by chance she arrived very late she would find the studio empty. He would go out, but when? What latitude should he leave her? Would it not be better for him to stay in the studio, and give her to understand by a few

carefully chosen, cold but polite words, that he did not wish to be kept waiting by his sitters. And suppose she did not come! Perhaps he would receive a telegram, a letter, or a servant or special messenger would bring him word. If she did not come, what should he do? It was a day wasted. He could not work now. So he would . . . Yes! he would go and call upon her, he wanted so much to see her. It was true, he *needed* her, it was such a deep, oppressive, tormenting need. What did it mean! love? But he did not feel an exaltation in the thought, nor passion in his veins, nor rêverie of the soul, in considering the fact that he was going to suffer greatly.

Suddenly, a pealing of the bell rang through the silent house, which made the artist's breath come in quick gasps, then a flood of joy swept over him as he went forward to meet her.

She came in. She was alone.

Immediately he felt strangely bold and daring. "Do you know what I have been asking myself all this while I have waited for you?" he said.

"Why no. How could I possibly know," she replied smiling.

"I have been asking myself if I am not in love with you."

"In love with me," she exclaimed, "that is too absurd. I think you really must be going mad," but she smiled and her eyes said: "Now I think that is very nice, and I am *so* happy." She continued: "But really you ought not to be so frivolous, why do you joke on the subject?"

"On the contrary, I am very serious," he replied,

"I assure you I am far from joking. I do not say that I am in love with you, but I am on a fair way to become so."

"What makes you think so?" she persisted.

"My emotions when you are not present and my happiness when you are here," he answered.

She laughed outright as she seated herself on the sofa.

"Oh! You need not worry over such symptoms," she said, "the moment that you sleep well, and have a good appetite for your dinner you are not in any particular danger, I assure you."

He laughed.

"And if I cannot sleep, and I lose my appetite," he said, "What then?"

"Acquaint me with the fact at once," she replied.

"And what then?"

"I would stay away and leave you to get cured in peace."

"Thanks! how very kind you are," he said dryly.

And on the subject of this love they chatted all the afternoon. It was the same the following days. She accepted it as an amusing joke — of no importance. She questioned him gayly as she entered.

"And how is love to-day?"

And he told her in a tone half serious, half light, the progress his affection had made, all the intimate workings of the tenderness which was born and which was growing in him. He analyzed minutely his sentiments to her hour by hour, since their parting of the day before, as though he was a professor who was discoursing on an interesting problem to his class. And she listened to him interested and slightly moved and

stirred by the story, which seemed that of a book of which she was the heroine. When he had enumerated in a witty and droll manner all the symptoms of which he had become the prey, his voice would suddenly tremble in expressing by a word or by an intonation of the voice, the real suffering of his heart. And always she questioned him, vibrating with curiosity, her eyes fixed upon him, her ears eagerly drinking in the words that were so wrong to approve of, but so charming to hear. Sometimes when he came close to her to arrange the pose more to his satisfaction, he would take her hand and try to kiss it. With a quick movement she would draw it away from his lips saying coldly:

"Please continue your painting."

He would take up his palette and brush again, but before five minutes had passed, she would ask him a question that would bring him back quickly to the subject that occupied them both. She now began to feel in her heart a certain fear. She wanted to be loved, but not too much. Sure of herself, and of not being won by him, she dreaded to let the adventure go too far. Suppose she were to lose him altogether; if, after she had appeared to encourage him so much, he was forced to see the hopelessness of it all? If however she was obliged to give up this sweet friendship, this lover-like talk, which flowed on, rolling out portions of love, like a river with sandy beds of gold,—she would feel an intense grief, it would leave a deep scar as though her heart had been torn.

When she left her home to go to the studio a wave of deep joy rushed warmly through her veins, which left her superbly happy and gay. As she put up her hand to ring the doorbell of his home, her heart

bounded with impatience, and the carpet on the stairs was scarcely touched as her feet flew over it.

Nevertheless Bertin became gloomy, more nervous, and often irritable.

One day when she came in, he sat down by her side instead of commencing his work and said to her very gravely:

"Madame, you can no longer ignore that it is not a joking matter with me, but that I love you madly."

Thoroughly alarmed by his words and feeling that the dreaded crisis was at hand, she tried to stop him from saying more, but he would not heed her. His heart was overflowing with emotion, and she was forced to listen to him, as she stood there, pale, trembling and uneasy. He talked for a long time, but never once asked for her love, he spoke with tenderness and a sad and hopeless resignation. He gently took her hand in his, and she let it lay in his warm clasp. Before she could stop him he had dropped on his knees beside her, and prayed her in tones of anguish not to do him more harm. Harm! What harm? She scarcely understood, she did not wish to understand, she felt numbed by a cruel grief to see him suffer so. Had she really *harmed* him? Suddenly she saw the tears spring to his eyes. She caught her breath sharply and cried out. She tried to comfort him as she would comfort a child who was hurt.

"Stop! Stop dear," he said, in a voice scarcely audible, "I am suffering too much."

At the sight of his agony, of the tears which he manfully strove to hide, her nerves gave way, her arms trembled in readiness to open to him. When she felt herself folded tightly in his arms, and felt his warm,

She felt herself folded tightly in his arms.

passionate kisses upon her lips, she wanted to cry out, to struggle, to push him from her, but she knew she was lost, was she not consenting even when trying to resist, giving herself, while struggling, for she was clasping him tightly all the while although crying out: "No! No! I cannot! I cannot." . . .

After, she remained for a moment dazed, hiding her burning face in her hands, then she sprang to her feet, snatched her hat from the carpet where it had fallen, stuck the pins roughly through her hair and fled from the room, without heeding the artist's entreaties to remain. When she reached the street, she stood weak and trembling on the side walk, her breath coming in short gasps, her knees shook, she wanted to sit down on the curb-stone and rest. A cab was passing, she made a sign to the driver who pulled up beside her.

"Go very slowly, and drive me anywhere," she said to the man as he opened the door for her.

She stumbled into the cab, closed both the windows, and then flung herself down in the corner. She felt alone behind the closed glass — alone to think. She remained stunned,— she looked at the houses, the people walking by, the cabs, the omnibuses, with empty eyes that saw nothing. She thought of nothing — it was as though she were allowing herself a respite, before daring to reflect upon what had passed. Then as she had a quick mind, and was by no means weak spirited, she looked the situation in the face.

"I am ruined," she said slowly.

She remained bewildered under the certitude of an irreparable misfortune, dismayed as a man is, who has fallen from a height, and who dares not move, know-

ing that his limbs are broken but dreading to verify the fact. Then, instead of being maddened by the pain which she was awaiting and dreading, she remained peaceful and calm as she came out of the catastrophe, her heart beat gently after this fall which had depressed her soul, and no longer seemed to take part in the bewilderment of her thoughts. She repeated aloud as if to convince herself: "I am ruined; I am no longer a good woman." There was no echo of suffering in her heart to this plaint of the conscience. She let herself be gently swayed as the cab rattled on over the stony streets, putting off the reasoning she would have to make later on this cruel situation. She was afraid to think, that was all, afraid to understand and reflect. But she was not going to suffer! On the contrary, it seemed to her as though she felt in that obscure and impenetrable being created in us by the incessant struggle of our inclinations — an unnatural quietude.

After half an hour of this strange repose, understanding that the despair she expected would not come, she shook herself out of the torpor, murmuring:

"It seems so strange that I have no regrets." Then she began to reproach herself. An anger rose up against herself for her blindness and her weakness. Why had she not foreseen it? Why had she not known that the hour of reckoning would surely come, that this man pleased her enough to make her a coward, and that in the most moral hearts, desire sometimes comes like a whirlwind and sweeps away all resistance. When she had severely reprimanded and despised herself she wondered with a sort of dismay what would happen next.

Her first thought was to break off all intercourse

with the painter, and never see him again, but scarcely had she formed this resolution than a thousand reasons came at once to combat it. How should she explain the situation? What would she say to her husband; if the truth was suspected would she not be whispered about, then would it not be spread abroad everywhere? It would be far better so as to save appearances to play *vis-à-vis* of Olivier Bertin a hypocritical comedy of indifference and forgetfulness, and to show him that she had already wiped out that moment from her memory, and from her life. Would she be able to do it? Did she have the courage to appear as though she had forgotten everything, to look at him in astonished indignation and say:

"I don't understand you, I really do not know what you expect of me," to say that to the man with whom she had shared that swift and powerful emotion.

She thought for a long time, and finally decided that it was the only thing to do, no other solution appeared possible. She would go to him the next day with her courage in both hands and give him to clearly understand what her wishes were, and what she expected of him: there must not be the slightest word, or allusion, or even look that could recall that moment of shame. After they had suffered, for she knew he would suffer also, he would surely take her part, and see that it was the only way she could act, he was a loyal and true man, and he would live in the future what he had been up till now.

As soon as she had decided on the course she intended to pursue, she gave the cab driver her address and told him to drive her home. When she entered her home she was seized with a profound prostration

and a desire to be alone — to see no one, to sleep and forget.

Locking herself in her room, she remained on her couch until dinner time. She went down stairs punctually at the hour, and was surprised to feel so calm and to be able to meet her husband with her usual composure. He came into the room carrying their little girl in his arms. She shook hands and greeted him without any feeling of remorse.

M. de Guilleroy asked her what she had been doing all the afternoon. She replied with indifference that she had been posing at the studio, as usual.

" Is the likeness good? " he asked.

" It is getting very good."

He talked of his business affairs, which he liked to relate while eating; of the sitting at the Chamber; and the discussion of the project of law on the adulteration of the commodities.

His prattling she usually supported, but to-night it annoyed her, and she looked with greater attention at the ordinary, tedious man who was interested in such things; but she smiled pleasantly while she listened, and was even more gracious than usual. She was thinking all the time that she sat opposite him: " I have deceived him! He is my lawful husband, and I have deceived him! Nothing can alter what has happened, nothing can wipe it out. I consented during a few brief moments to lie in the arms of another man, to receive another man's kisses. I am no longer a good woman. A few seconds in my life, that I can never blot out, have brought to me this irretrievable act, so serious, so short, but the most shameful sin for a woman to commit . . . and I do not feel any despair.

. . . How strange! If any one had told me yesterday that I could have felt like this, I should not have believed it; I should have thought at once of the fearful remorse . . . and I have none . . . hardly any."

M. de Guilleroy went out after dinner as he was in the habit of doing every evening. Then she drew her little girl on to her knees and cried softly as she kissed her. Her tears were sincere, they were conscience tears, but not heart tears.

That night she scarcely slept; in the darkness of her room, she thought of the dangers which she would run in regard to the artist, she dreaded the meeting on the morrow, and all she would have to pretend, while looking into his eyes. All the morning she lay prostrated on her couch: she tried to argue with herself that she had nothing to fear, she thought of what he might say, and what she would have to reply; she must be ready for all. She started to the studio earlier than usual so as to be able to walk slowly and to collect her thoughts while walking.

He scarcely expected to see her; all day he had asked himself what he ought to do. After her flight, which he had been afraid to stop, he had remained standing there listening to her flying footsteps, and the frantic struggle she had with the latch of the door in her nervous agitation. He heard the slamming of the door, and he stood there in the room alone feeling a deep, fierce joy. He had possessed her, *her*. It was over. Could it be possible? After the surprise of his triumph, he thought of the delight he had felt at taking her, and laid down again on the couch where he had possessed her to bring back the sweet memory.

He lay there a long time full of the delirious thought that she was his mistress, and that between them,— between him and the woman whom he had so much desired, in a few moments there was knotted the mysterious tie which secretly binds two beings one to the other. He still felt through all his trembling body the acute recollection of the quick moments when their lips had met and their bodies united, quivering together in the great passion of life.

He did not go out that evening, and so as to be able to dwell more on the thought of the happiness that had come to him, he went to bed early, vibrating with emotion.

As soon as he awoke the next morning he asked himself what he ought to do, had she been a *cocotte* or an actress, he would have sent her some flowers, or possibly some jewels, but this was quite another sort of affair and he was decidedly perplexed. There was one thing he must do: he must write to her . . . but what? He commenced, scribbled and tore up at least twenty letters, they seemed to him in this particular case to be offensive, odious, and ridiculous. He wanted to express to her in a refined and delicate manner, in an outburst of tenderness, his gratitude, and his offers of everlasting devotion, but all he could say were the usual commonplace phrases, expressions, that with her would be too coarse and foolish. So he gave up the idea of writing, and decided to call and see her instead; he would go as soon as the hour for the sitting had passed, he did not think for one moment that she would come.

He closed himself up in his studio, and stood before her portrait, his lips twitching with a mad desire to press

themselves on the canvas where something of hers was fixed. From time to time he would walk from the picture to the window and look up and down the street; every woman he saw coming along made his heart beat quickly: twenty times he thought he recognized her, and when the woman he had seen had come and gone, he sat down in his chair, angry and depressed as though he had been deceived. Suddenly he saw her! No! he doubted, took his field-glasses, recognized her, and overcome by a violent emotion sat down to await her. When she came in, he went forward joyfully to meet her and grasped her hands, but she pulled them away brusquely, and as he knelt at her feet, overcome with anguish, and eyes raised to hers entreatingly, she said coldly:

"What *are* you doing? I don't understand this attitude."

"Oh! Madame. I beg of you" . . . he stammered.

"Get up! You are simply ridiculous, this is too absurd," she said severely.

He stood up and looked at her wildly.

"What has happened? tell me. Do not treat me like this. I love you" . . . he murmured.

Then in a few quick, cold words she expressed to him her wishes, and signified clearly that the affair must end.

"I really cannot see what you can have to say to me," she added, "there is one thing I must ask you, that is never to speak of your love to me; if you do, I shall leave the studio at once and not return. If for one moment — one moment only — you forget this condition, you will never see me again."

"Madame, if it is your wish, I will obey you," he said quietly.

"That is right," she said, "I knew you would do as I ask you. I am not mistaken in you. Now continue your work, it seems to me you are very long finishing the portrait."

He took up his palette and began to paint, but his hand trembled so he could hardly hold the brush, his eyes were dim, he could scarcely see the blurred canvas before him: he felt his heart was bruised and he wanted to cry out in his pain. He tried to speak to her, but she answered him coldly; he looked up from the picture and paid a pretty compliment to her exquisite coloring, but she stopped him in so sharp a tone, that suddenly he felt one of those lover's furies, which turn love into hatred. He felt a strong nervous upheaval throughout his body and soul, and at once, without transition, he detested her. So after all, she was like the other women. Why not? Why should she be different. She was false, fickle, and weak like them all; she had attracted and beguiled him by the tricks of a *cocotte,* she had fanned the flames of his passion and made him care for her, with no thought of being anything to him after, challenging him, then refusing him, employing all the wiles of the shameful women who seem always ready to give themselves so long as the men, whom they render like unto the dogs of the street, are not panting with desire.

Taut pis pour elle, it was worse for her, so it served her right. He had had her, *voilà!* She could be as haughty as she liked, and talk to him insolently, but she could not efface her shame, and he was a man, he would forget it. Really, he would have done a fool-

ish thing to have taken a mistress, who would have eaten up his artist's life with the capricious teeth of a pretty woman.

He felt like whistling, just the same as he did before his models, but as he felt his annoyance increase, he was afraid he might say something rude, that he would regret after, so he shortened the sitting under pretext of an appointment. When they wished each other a formal good-bye, it seemed to both that they were farther apart than on the day when they had first met at the Duchess de Mortemain's.

As soon as she had gone, he put on his hat and coat and went out. It was cold. In the dull sky the winter sun struggled behind a hazy mist, throwing on the city a pale grayish light, which seemed a little false and sad.

He walked for a long time with quick impatient step: he went straight ahead pushing aside the people who came in his way, then little by little his anger against her diminished in disconsolation and regrets. After he had repeated all the reproaches he had made, he noticed the women as they drove by and compared them with her. How much prettier she was than they. Like many others who do not know it, he had been waiting for the impossible encounter, that unique, rare affection — poetic and passionate, which our dreams chisel on our hearts. Had he not found it? Was she not the one who could have given him this almost impossible happiness? Why do our dreams never realize? Why can we never grasp that which we are pursuing? Why do we only get small portions which make this chase after deception more sorrowful? It was not from her, he wanted more, but from life itself. Now that he was able to reason calmly, he

asked himself: "What did he wish? After all, why should he reproach her? Because she had been kind and good to him? Did she not have far greater cause to reproach him? His conduct had been that of a cad!"

He returned sadly to his studio. He felt now that he would like to ask her pardon, and do all he could, to make her forget. He wondered what he could do, to make her understand that until death he would be obedient to all her wishes.

The next day when she came, she brought her little girl with her; her smile was so mournful, her look so sad, and the painter saw in her big blue eyes which had always been so gay with laughter, all the trouble, the remorse, and the desolation that the heart of a woman can suffer. He was moved with pity. He tried to make her forget, and showed the most delicate reserve in anticipating her every wish. She acknowledged his kindnesses with sweet gratitude, but with the weary and bruised attitude of a woman who suffered.

Seeing her thus, he was seized again with the mad wish to love her, and be loved by her. He began to ask himself how was it she was not more angry with him, why did she come back again, and listen and reply to him, when so much had passed between them. If she could see him, and hear his voice, and tolerate, when with him, the thought that could not leave her, it could only be that the thought had not become odious. When a woman hates a man who has wronged her, she can not meet him without showing her hatred, he can not remain indifferent to her, that is impossible, she will either detest or pardon him. And if she can forgive the wrong, she is not far from loving him. As

he slowly mixed his paints he reasoned thus with arguments precise, clear and sure. It was all clear now, he understood, he was master of the situation and able to cope with all emergencies.

He would have to remain patient, be prudent and devoted, and then some day he would have her again. He knew how to wait. To reassure her, and conquer her again, he in his turn would resort to ruses. He concealed his tenderness under apparent remorse, under hesitating attentions and indifferent attitudes. Serene in the certitude of a near happiness, which would come to him sooner or later, he even felt a sort of odd, keen pleasure in not hurrying it. He could wait, for he knew she would some day be his.

"She is afraid," he said, as he saw her bring her little girl with her every time.

He felt, as she looked at him with constrained and embarrassed eyes, that the slow work was steadily progressing, that they were getting nearer and closer to each other. Hers was the call of a soul that is struggling and of a wish that is weakening and which seemed to cry out "Force me." "Force me."

After a while, being reassured by his manner, she came alone, and he treated her as a friend; he spoke to her of his life, his projects, his art, just as a comrade or a brother would. Beguiled by his unconstrained manner she accepted joyfully the rôle of adviser, she was flattered that he distinguished her thus from other women, and she felt that her mind and talents would acquire a greater delicacy from this intellectual intimacy. By dint of consulting and showing deference to her, she passed naturally from the duties of adviser to the priesthood of inspirator. She was delighted to feel

what an influence she had over this great man,— she came nearer to being what he loved as an artist, since she inspired his work.

And so it happened one evening after a long talk on celebrated painters and their mistresses, he bent towards her, and she let herself be folded in his arms. This time she stayed there without trying to fly from him and gave him back the warm kisses he gave her. Then she had no more regrets, but she felt a vague sentiment of having fallen, and to reply to the reproaches of her reason, she believed in a judgment.

Drawn to him by her heart that was purely virginal, and by her soul which was empty, her body was conquered by the slow dominion of the caresses. She became attached to him little by little, as only a tender, clinging woman could, who for the first time in her life knows what love is.

With him it was different; his was a storm of fierce love,— sensual and poetic.

The portrait was finished, and it was without doubt the best he had ever painted, for he had found and fixed that inexpressible *something* which a painter rarely discovers — the reflex, the mystery, the physiognomy of the soul which passes imperceptibly across the face.

The months went by, then the years, but they scarcely loosened the tie which united the Countess de Guilleroy and the artist Olivier Bertin. With him it was no longer the exaltation, as at the beginning of their *liaison,* but a calm, deep affection — a loving friendship.

With Madame de Guilleroy it was different, her passionate attachment for the artist increased, it was the firm attachment that certain women have, who lov-

ing once, love always. Honest and true in their adultery, as they would have been in their marriages — had they been marriages of love, they dedicate themselves to a unique tenderness from which nothing can turn them. Not only do they love their lovers, but they want to love them, their hearts are so full of thoughts of them that nothing else can enter. They have bound their lives with resolve, just as one binds the hands before jumping into deep water, when one can swim, but wants to be drowned.

From the moment that the Countess had given herself to the artist, she was assailed with fears for his constancy; nothing held him but his desire, his sentiment, his fancy for a woman he had met one day, as he had met so many others before.

She felt that he was so free and easily tempted; he lived without duties, ties, or scruples like all men. He was handsome, celebrated and distinguished, and had within reach of his desires — desires so easily moved — the worldly women whose modesty is so fragile, and the women of the alcove and the theaters who lavish their favors on men such as he.

She lived constantly in the fear of losing him, watching his behavior and his attitude, disturbed by a word, full of anguish when he admired another woman, praising the charm of her face or the grace of her style. She trembled at the thought of what she did not know in his life, and all that she did know frightened and saddened her. Every time they met she ingeniously questioned him without his being aware of it, she asked him his opinion on people that he had seen in the houses where he had dined, on the slightest impressions he

received. As soon as she thought she divined the possible influence of someone, she fought against it with marvelous guile, with innumerable resources.

Often she had a foreboding of a short intrigue, not deeply rooted — an intrigue which lasted a week or two weeks, the affairs that come from time to time in the life of every artist. She had what one might call the intuition of danger, before she was even warned of the awakening of a new desire within Olivier, by the air of fête which the eyes and the expression of a man takes who is pursuing a *gallant fantasy* with excessive excitement.

And so she commenced to suffer. Her sleep was disturbed by these tortures of doubt. To confirm her fears she would go to the studio without making an appointment with him, and ask him questions which seemed naive, listen to his words and examine his heart as one examines and feels and listens to find out the harm hidden in the body. And when she was alone the tears would come, she was so sure they would take him from her this time, they would steal from her this love to which she clung with such strength, because she had put into it all her will, all her strength of affection, all her hopes, and all her dreams. Then when she knew he had returned to her after these quick estrangements she felt, in taking him back, in possessing him again,— like something lost and then refound — a silent and deep happiness, which sometimes, when she passed before a church would make her enter the sacred doors and kneel down to thank God.

The ever present wish to please him above all others and to keep him against all, had made of her entire life an interrupted fight of coquetterie. She struggled for

him without ceasing. She fought against the decline of her beauty and grace, so that wherever he went he would hear her spoken of in terms of admiration, he would hear them praise her looks, her style and her exquisite gowns. She bewitched and pleased other men, but only for him, so that he would be proud and jealous of her; and each time when she knew he was jealous, after having made him suffer a little, then she would let him triumph over them all, and so revived his love in exciting his vanity. And knowing full well that a man can always meet a woman whose physical seductions, being a novelty, would be more powerful, she had resource to other means, she flattered and spoilt him. In a cautious, but never ceasing manner, she let the praises flow upon him, she rocked him in admiration, and wrapped him in compliments, so he was forced to see, when with other women, that their friendship, and even their tenderness was cold and incomplete, and that no one could compare with her.

She made of her house — of her drawing-rooms to which he came so often — a place where his pride as an artist would be attracted, as much as his heart of a man, she made it the spot in Paris where he liked best to come, because all his egotistical inclinations could be gratified. Not only did she learn all his tastes so that in satiating them, she gave him an impression of well-being which nothing could replace, but she knew how to awaken new tastes and would create *gourmandises* of sorts, both material and sentimental, habits of little thoughtful attentions, of affection, of flattery. She sought to captivate his eyes by elegance, his sense of smell by the most delicate perfumes, his ears by compliments and his palate by the choicest food. When

she had done so much for his body and soul, feasting a multitude of small tyrannical wants, when she was quite sure that no other friend would give him the care and look after his needs as she did, she commenced to have worse fears. All this loving care made him speak with disgust of his own home, and complain of living alone, and of not being able to call and see her, except with all the reserve imposed by society — he would go to the club or elsewhere to find the means to lessen his loneliness, and so she had the fear that he might marry. Sometimes she suffered so much with this dread that she would have welcomed old age to end the agony, and to rest in a chilled and calm affection.

The years passed without severing the tie; the chain which she had made was strong, and as the links began to show signs of wear, she remade them, but always anxiously watching the painter's heart, as one would watch a child crossing a dangerous street, and each day she dreaded more the unknown fatality, whose menace hangs over us.

The Count, without suspicion or jealousy, found this intimacy between his wife and the famous artist — who was received everywhere with great respect — perfectly natural, and in the course of time the two men meeting so frequently, finished by having a strong regard and liking for each other.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Bertin arrived at his friend's home on the Friday evening that she was giving a dinner to celebrate her daughter's return, he found M. de Musadieu, who was sitting in the little Louis XV *salon,* the only arrival.

Musadieu was an elderly man of wit who might perhaps have become a man of worth, but he had now reached the age when one ceases to worry over "what might have been." As an old preserver of the Imperial museums he had found the means to be renominated Inspector of the Beaux-Arts under the Republic; this did not prevent him from being above all, the friend of all the princes and princesses of the European aristocracy, and the sworn patron of artists of all kinds. He was endowed with a keen intelligence, a rare foresight, and a gift of speech which enabled him to express the most difficult things in the most tactful manner — a quickness of thought which placed him at ease in any society, and a shrewd diplomatic scent, which enabled him to form at once a correct opinion on the character of a man. All day long he went from one smart *salon* to another, brilliant, amusing, and useless. Capable of doing most things, he spoke on all subjects with a pretended competency,— he had a bright manner of diffusing his knowledge which made him a great favorite with the society women to whom he rendered the services of a rolling bazaar of erudition. As a matter of fact, he did know a great deal, although many of the standard works he had not even read, but he was at his best with the various academies, the scholars, authors, and learned specialists to whom he had

listened with great discernment. Any explanations in regard to the relative subjects, that were too technical or superfluous, he was able to forget at once, and kept only in mind the absolute facts; his acquirement thus gleaned, made him as clearly understood as a scientific fable. He gave one the impression of an emporium of ideas, one of those great stores, where one can never find any rare object, but where all other goods are to be found in abundance — articles of all sorts and makes, from kitchen utensils to cheap instruments of domestic surgery.

The artists with whom his official duties brought him in contact, liked and feared him. He was able to do them great service, he found customers for their pictures and gave them introductions to influential people, he liked to introduce them, patronize and launch them. He seemed to devote himself in a mysterious manner to the work of uniting the artist with the world. He gloried in being known intimately by *these* and to enter familiarly into the homes of *those* and to lunch with the Prince of Wales when he visited Paris, and then dine the same evening with Paul Adelmans, Olivier Bertin and Amaury Maldant.

Bertin liked him well enough, he found him diverting — as he remarked he was "the encyclopedia of Jules Verne, with the skin of an ass for a binding."

When Bertin entered the *salon* he came forward and shook hands and began at once to speak of the political situation; there were rumors of war which Musadieu thought rather alarming for obvious reasons which he exposed very strongly — Germany having all interest to crush France, and to hasten this moment which had been waited for so long by Bismark; while

Olivier Bertin proved by irrefutable arguments that these fears were chimerical. Germany would not be so foolish as to compromise her victory in an adventure so doubtful, neither would the Chancellor be so imprudent as to risk at the last days of his life, in a single venture, his work and glory of a lifetime. However, Musadieu seemed to know something that he did not wish to mention, besides it was only that very day that he had talked with one of the ministers, and had met the Grand Duke Vladimir, on his way from Cannes, only the evening before. The artist argued and with calm irony disputed the competency of the best informed people. Why! at the back of all these rumors they were preparing great movements on the stock exchange!

M. de Guilleroy came into the room and shook hands with effusion, excusing himself by a few polite phrases for having let them remain alone.

"And you, my dear deputy" said the artist, "what do you think of these rumors?"

M. de Guilleroy started a speech. Oh! yes, he knew more than most people, being a member of the Chamber, but, at the same time, he did not hold the opinion of the majority of his colleagues. No! he did not think there was any probability of a near conflict unless it was provoked by the French turbulence and by the disturbance of the so-called patriots of the league. He spoke of M. de Bismark in the highest terms, he made a portrait of him à la Saint-Simon. The people would not try to understand that man, for they always attributed to him their own manner of thinking. M. Bismark was not a false and lying diplomat, but a frank, honest man who always cried out the truth,

announcing his intentions. "I want peace" he cried, and it was true, he wanted peace and nothing but peace, and everything had proved it for the last eighteen years,— *everything* — even to his accoutrements, to his alliances, to the mass of people united against our impetuosity. M. de Guilleroy concluded by saying in a decided tone — a tone that admitted of no argument:

"Gentlemen, he is a great man who desires peace above all, but who believes only in threats and violent means to obtain it."

"The means to the end," quoted Musadieu.

"I will agree with you," he continued, smiling, "that he wants peace, if you will agree with me, that he wants to fight in order to obtain it. It is always so, it is an indisputable and phenomenal truth that we only have war so as to get peace."

At this moment the butler threw open the paneled doors and announced:

"The Duchess de Mortemain."

The Duchess was a tall, fine woman. She swept into the room with an air of authority. Guilleroy rose quickly to meet her, and bending over her hand, he kissed her fingers.

"How do you do, my dear Duchess!" he said. The two other men greeted her with a certain distinguished familiarity, for the Duchess had a cordial and brusque manner.

Widow of the General Duke de Mortemain, mother of an only child who was married to the Prince de Salia, daughter of the Marquis de Farandal, of high birth and royally rich, she received in her home, on the rue de Varenne, all the celebrities of the entire world. No Royal Highness passed through Paris

without dining at her table, and no man could speak of an august personage without her wanting to know him at once. She must see him, talk to him, judge him. It amused her greatly and brought excitement into her life, feeding the flame of haughty, but friendly curiosity which burnt within her. She was scarcely seated when the butler again flung open the double doors and announced:

"The Baron and Baroness de Corbelle."

The new arrivals were both young,— the baron clean shaven and stout, the baroness, slim, elegant, and very dark. The couple held a unique position in the French aristocracy, due mainly to the scrupulous choice of their acquaintances. Of small nobility of no importance they were moved in all their acts by an immoderate love of what is select, distinguished, and correct. By dint of frequenting the richest houses, by showing their patriotism as royalists, being pious, correct in the greatest degree, because they respected all that should be respected, and despised all that should be despised, and never made a breach on any worldly dogma, never hesitated in regard to a detail in etiquette, they were able to pass before the eyes of the majority for the flower of high-life. Their opinion was a sort of code of what should be and their presence in a house constituted for it a genuine title of honorability.

The Corbelles were related to the Count de Guilleroy.

"Well," said the Duchess at last, "I should very much like to know where your wife is, Guilleroy."

"Just a moment, Duchess, there is to be a surprise," said the Count, "she will be here soon."

When Madame de Guilleroy made her entrée in the social world after she had been married to the Count

only a month, she was presented to the Duchess de Mortmain, who at once loved her, adopted her, and became her chaperon. For twenty years this friendship had lasted and when the Duchess called her " my child " one could still hear in her voice the emotion of this sudden and persistent infatuation. It was at her home that the artist and the Countess had met for the first time.

" Have you been to see the Exhibition of the Intemperants, Madame la Duchesse? " asked Musadieu.

" No! What's that? " she asked brusquely.

" Merely a group of new artists, who are impressionists to the state of inebriety; there are two who are very good."

" I do not like the jokes of these men," said the *grande dame* haughtily.

A woman of authority, brusque, scarcely admitting other opinions than her own, and establishing hers solely on the consciousness of her social position, she considered, without knowing them, that artists and scholars were so many mercenary, intelligent beings who had been sent by God to amuse the nobility, or to render them services. She gave no other basis for her judgment, than the degree of astonishment and of irrational pleasure that the view of something procured her, the reading of a book or the narration of a discovery.

Tall, stout, florid, with a loud voice, she passed for having *un grand air* because nothing troubled her, she was not afraid to say anything, and she patronized the whole world — the dethroned princes by her receptions in their honor, and even the Almighty by her liberality to the clergy, and her donations to the churches.

Musadieu turned to her again and said: " Have

Two blonde women in white lace gowns came into the room.

you heard that they believe that they have arrested Marie Lambourg's assassin?"

Her interest was aroused at once.

"No! Tell me all about it," she said eagerly.

He told her all the details.

Musadieu was tall, very thin, and wore a white waistcoat with diamond studs. He talked without gesticulating with his hands, and with such a correct air that it permitted him to say risky things in a manner that was his specialty. He was very short-sighted, and seemed, in spite of his eyeglass, never to see anyone. When he sat down it seemed as though all the bones of his body bent to the shape of his chair. His torso when curved became quite small, collapsed as if the vertebral column was made of rubber; his legs crossed one over the other looked like two rolls of ribbon, and his long arms extending out on the sides of the chair, let his white hands with their thin fingers hang down limply. His hair and his mustache artistically dyed with the white strands carefully covered, was a subject for many jokes.

As he was explaining to the Duchess that the jewels belonging to the murdered street-walker had been given as a present, it was presumed, by the murderer to another woman of light habits, the door of the large salon again opened widely, and two blonde women in white lace gowns — blonde in billows of cream maline, resembling each other as two sisters of different ages, the one a little too mature, the other a little too young, the one just a shade too stout, the other a shade too thin, came into the room, smiling, with their arms around each other's waists.

Everyone cried out joyfully and clapped their hands. Olivier Bertin was the only one who knew that Annette de Guilleroy had returned, and the appearance of the young girl beside her mother was a great surprise. Madame de Guilleroy at a distance looked quite as young and much prettier than her daughter, for although she was a flower just a little too full blown, she was still very beautiful, while the young girl just blossoming into womanhood was only beginning to be pretty.

The Duchess was delighted and clapped her hands, exclaiming:

"*Mon Dieu,* are they not ravishing, side by side! Look, M. de Musadieu, they are just alike."

Two opinions were formed at once. According to Musadieu, the Corbelles and Count de Guilleroy, they were only alike in complexion, hair, and eyes; these were exact, they were equally specked with black points which looked like small spots of ink fallen on a blue iris, but apart from these features they declared that when Annette would have become a woman, there would scarcely be any resemblance. But according to the duchess and Olivier Bertin, they were alike in every respect. It was merely their ages which made them appear different.

"Hasn't she altered in these three years," said the artist. "I should not have known her. I shall be afraid to speak to her familiarly. How can I say 'thou' to her now?"

The Countess laughed.

"Why! I never heard of such a thing. It would be very funny indeed if you were to *tutoyer* Annette."

Annette gave him a timid look but behind her look

there was seen the gleam of her future mischievousness.

"It is I who will be afraid to say '*tu*' to M. Bertin," she said, looking at him with a half smile.

"You may both keep to this bad habit, I will permit it," said Madame de Guilleroy, "you will soon get acquainted again."

But Annette shook her head. "No! I could not, mamma, it would embarrass me."

The Duchess, after kissing the girl, looked at her attentively.

"There, little one," she said, "stand before me, and look straight at me. Yes, you are the image of your mother, you will be very pretty in a few years' time, when you have taken on a little brilliancy. And you must get fatter, not much, but just a little. You are skinny now."

"Oh, don't say that," cried the Countess.

"And why not?"

"It is so nice to be slim, I am doing all I can to get thinner."

At this Madame de Mortemain became angry, forgetting in her excitement that she was speaking before a young girl.

"There it is again, we are always in the fashion for bones, I suppose because one can dress them better than flesh. This is the generation of thin women. It makes me think of the cows of Egypt; I do not understand in the least how men can pretend to admire your carcasses. In my time they wanted better than that."

Everyone smiled; turning to Annette she added:

"Look at your mother, child, she is perfect in every way, grow like her."

Dinner was served, so they passed on into the dining-

room; when they were seated Musadieu recommenced the discussion.

"I think that men should be thin," he said, "because they are made for exercises which require address and agility, which are incompatible with a stomach. The case with women is different, however. Don't you think so, Corbelle?"

Corbelle looked confused. The Duchess was extremely stout, and his own wife more than thin, but the Baroness came to his help by pronouncing decidedly in favor of slimness. The year before she had wrestled fearfully with the commencement of *embonpoint,* but she had mastered it very quickly. "What did you do?" asked Madame de Guilleroy eagerly.

And the Baroness explained the method used by all the smart slim women of the day. One must not drink when eating, in fact not until an hour after the meal, then a cup of tea is permitted, but it must be very hot,— *almost boiling.* That is successful with everybody. She cited some astonishing examples of exceptionally fat women, who had followed this régime and in three months had become thinner than the blade of a knife.

The Duchess was exasperated.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed. "What fools women are to torture themselves like that. You enjoy nothing — absolutely nothing, not even champagne. Now then Bertin, you are an artist, what is your opinion?"

"Madame! I am a painter, I drape, so it does not much matter to me. If I were a sculptor I might complain."

"But you are a man, frankly, which do you prefer?"

"I . . . Well . . . An elegance rather

well nourished, what my cook calls — a plump little corn-fed chicken, not too fat, but fine and plump."

Everyone laughed at the comparison, but the Countess remained incredulous.

"No! It is nice to be slim," she murmured, looking at her daughter. "Women who remain slim never look old."

On that point there was another discussion; however, everyone was of the same opinion in one respect; they all agreed that it was bad for a very fat woman to get very thin too quickly.

These observations gave rise to a review of society women, and of more debates on their grace, style, and beauty. Musadieu thought the blonde Marquise de Lochrist incomparably lovely, while Bertin declared that Madame Mandelière was without rival. She was a brunette with low forehead, dark, melancholy looking eyes, and a rather large mouth with gleaming teeth.

He was sitting next to Annette and turning to her he said:

"Listen carefully, Nanette, to all that we are saying now; you will hear it repeated at least once a week, up to the time when you are an old woman. In eight days you will know by heart what everybody thinks on politics, women, theaters, and the rest. When you have heard us all expose and defend our opinions, you can choose your own peacefully, amidst those that one ought to have, and then you need never trouble to think, you can rest."

Without replying she gave him a roguish look, her eyes sparkled with a bright young intelligence which was held in a leash, but quite ready to start. The Duchess and Musadieu played with their ideas as they

would a game of ball, throwing them at each other without noticing that they were throwing always the same; they were protesting in the name of thought and of human action.

Then Bertin attempted to show how much the intelligence of the people belonging to the upper class was without value, without substance and without import, how their beliefs were poorly founded, their attention to things of the mind feeble and indifferent, their tastes changeable and doubtful.

Seized by one of those fits of indignation, half real, half pretense, which first of all promotes the wish to be eloquent, and which suddenly warms a clear judgment that is ordinarily shadowed by benevolence, he showed how people whose only occupation was to make calls, dine *en ville,* and amuse themselves generally, became, by an irresistible fatality, the most frivolous and commonplace beings. They could be charming and amiable, but ordinary to a degree.

He showed that nothing with them had any depth, nothing was sincere, that their intellectual culture was nil, and their learning a simple varnish; in a word, they lived as dummies, giving the illusion and making the gestures of being the *élite* which they were not. He proved that as the frail roots of their instincts had grown amid conventions, and not amid realities, they could care for nothing sincerely, and that even the luxury itself of their existence was a vain satisfaction and not the appeasement of a refined want of their body. They live, he said, on the *side* of everything without penetrating or seeing anything, they live at the side of science, which they ignore; at the side of nature at which they do not know how to look; at the side of

happiness because they are incapable of enjoying anything to any great degree, at the side of beauty of the world, or the beauty of art, for they speak of it without understanding it, and even without believing it, they do not know that intoxication which comes with tasting the joys of life and intelligence. They are incapable of becoming attached to anything sufficiently to like it uniquely, of being interested in anything sufficiently to be enlightened by the satisfaction of understanding.

The Baron de Corbelle tried to defend their gay world, but his arguments were inconsistent and irrefutable,— those arguments that melt before reason, like snow before a fire and which one cannot grasp, like the absurd and triumphant reasonings that a country clergyman gives, who demonstrates God. In conclusion he compared the worldly people with race horses which, it is quite true, serve for nothing, but which are the glory of the equine family.

Bertin maintained a disdainful and polite silence, he was annoyed before this adversary but the Baron's remarks became, as he thought, too foolish, so he adroitly interrupted his discourse.

He stated exactly the daily routine of the society man; with all the details ingeniously set forth he drew an irresistibly comic silhouette. He portrayed monsieur being dressed by his valet, after explaining to his barber who came to shave him some general ideas, then the moment for the morning ride, questioning the groom on the health of the horses, cantering through the Bois, his chief anxiety being to bow and be acknowledged, then luncheon with his wife, a drive in her *coupé* in the afternoon, and not speaking to her except to men-

tion the people he had seen in the morning, then the calls going from drawing-room to drawing-room until the evening, and restrengthening his intelligence in the intercourse with his fellow creatures, in the evening,—a dinner with a prince where the general attitude of Europe was discussed, then finishing the *soirée* in the smoking-room or corridor at a dance, or the green room of the Opera, where his mild pretensions of a high liver could be easily satisfied by the appearance of a *mauvais lieu.*

The description was so just, without the sarcasm giving offense to anyone, that there was a general laugh.

The Duchess's portly person shook with suppressed mirth.

"No, really, it is too funny, I shall die with laughing," she said as her full chest heaved with little shakes.

Bertin, very elated, replied: "Oh! Madame, I assure you in the smart world we do not die of laughter; in fact, we scarcely laugh at all. We have the complaisance, by good taste, to look as though we are amused, and to make a pretense at laughing. We imitate the grimace very well indeed but we never do the real thing. Go in the cheap popular theaters, there you will see them laugh, go among the common people, you will see them laugh to suffocation, go into a soldiers' dormitory, you will see the men choking with laughter, their eyes full of tears, writhing on their beds before the antics of a gay companion. But in our drawing-rooms we never laugh. I tell you again we imitate everything even the laugh."

Musadieu stopped him.

"Pardon me! but I think you are too severe. Why

you yourself, my dear fellow, do not disdain this class, even though you scoff at it."

Bertin smiled.

"I, why I love it."

"Well then?"

"I have a slight contempt for myself as a mongrel of doubtful origin."

"Oh! Bertin, all you say is just for effect," said the Duchess, "You are only posing."

And as he denied such a thing she terminated this discussion by declaring that all artists tried to make people take balloons for lanterns. The conversation then became general — ordinary and mild,— amiable and discreet. As the dinner was drawing to a close the Countess suddenly exclaimed, showing her full glasses before her:

"You see, I have not drank anything — not a drop, now we shall see if I am going to get thinner." The Duchess was furious, and insisted upon her taking a little mineral water, but the Countess was obdurate.

"Oh! the simpleton," cried the Duchess, "the sight of her daughter has turned her head, I beg of you, Guilleroy, do stop your wife from continuing this folly."

The Count who was explaining to Musadieu the plan of a mechanical thrashing machine that had just been invented in America had not heard his wife's remark.

"What folly, my dear Duchess?" he asked.

"The absurd folly of wishing to become thin," she replied.

The Count glanced at his wife with friendly indifference.

"It is not my habit to oppose my wife's wishes," he said.

The Countess had risen from the table and taken her escort's arm, the Count offered his to the Duchess and they filed into the large drawing-room, the smaller room being reserved for day receptions. The immense *salon* was very lofty and light. The four walls were covered with beautiful panels of pale blue silk, with paintings of the olden times, in frames of white and gold, which took under the light of the lamps a soft, ethereal tint. In the center of the principal panel the portrait of Madame de Guilleroy painted by Olivier Bertin seemed to live and animate the room. Musadieu never passed the picture without complimenting the model on the artist's work. His opinion as a connoisseur, commissioned by the Government, having the value of a legal expert, he considered it his duty to affirm very often the superiority of the painting.

"It is true!" he remarked, "never have I seen a more beautiful modern portrait. It is so marvelously lifelike."

It had become almost a custom, a sort of practice of civility, like making the sign of the cross on entering a church to stand before it and express admiration. M. de Guilleroy had heard the praises sung so often that he was firmly convinced he possessed a chef-d'œuvre, but Olivier Bertin had grown accustomed to these eulogies and paid no more attention to them than if they were inquiries after the state of his health, nevertheless he arranged the reflector placed before it in a better position, the servant having carelessly adjusted it.

When they were seated the Duchess turned to the

Count and said, " My nephew is coming to fetch me this evening, and ask you for a cup of tea."

They had both formed the same wish in regard to her nephew's and Annette's future and each had tacitly understood the other, although no word on the subject had as yet been mentioned.

The brother of the Duchess de Mortemain, the Marquis de Farandal, after losing the greater part of his fortune at gambling, died from a fall from his horse, leaving a widow and one son.

Now arrived at the age of eighteen this young man was one of the most sought after leaders of the cotillon in Europe, he had been sent for from Vienna and London to award the prizes at the royal balls. This dancing and sportive glory had to be established while he was quite young, so that he could make a rich marriage and replace his social success by political successes. As soon as he became a deputy, if he made a good marriage, he could then become one of the columns of the future throne, one of the king's counselors and a leader of the royalist party.

The Duchess was well informed and knew the immense fortune the Guilleroys possessed, it had heaped up, for they lived in a simple although luxurious apartment, when they could have lived *en grands seigneurs* in one of the most beautiful homes in Paris. She knew all about his successful speculations, his shrewd scent of a financier, his share in the most prosperous affairs that had been launched in ten years, hence her wish to marry her nephew to the daughter of a Normandy deputy, to whom this marriage would give a weighty influence in the aristocratic society of the retinue of princes.

Guilleroy, who had made a rich marriage and doubled by his cleverness a large personal fortune, was plotting for higher ambitions. He believed in the return of a king, and hoped that when the time arrived, he would be in a position to profit by the event in the most satisfactory manner. As a simple deputy he did not count for much, but as father-in-law to the Marquis de Farandal whose ancestors had been the loyal and chosen friends of the royal house of France he would mount to the highest rank. Besides, the Duchess's friendship for his wife lent an intimate and valuable character to this union. The fear that the Marquis would meet and be attracted by another young girl, had made him send for his daughter so as to hasten the event.

Madame de Mortemain had guessed his project and lent a silent complicity and this same day, although she had not known of his daughter's return, she had made an appointment with her nephew to fetch her at the Guilleroy home, so that little by little he would get on closer terms with the family. To-night for the first time the Count and the Duchess spoke of their mutual hopes, and before she left, a treaty of alliance was concluded.

At the other end of the salon they were laughing gayly. M. de Musadieu was telling the Baroness of the presentation of a negro Ambassador to the President of the Republic,— when the Marquis de Farandal was announced.

He appeared in the doorway, then stood still. With a quick and habitual movement of the arm he fixed a monocle on his right eye, and left it there, as if to find out what kind of place he was entering, and possibly to

give the people before him the pleasure of looking at him and note the way he entered; then by a quick twist of the cheek and the eyebrow, he let the monocle, which was attached to a silken hair chain, fall from his eye, and walked quickly up to Madame de Guilleroy, whose outstretched hand he kissed as he bent courteously over it. He did the same to his aunt, then shook hands with the rest, going from one to the other with an easy grace.

He was a tall, fine youth with a red mustache, which had already required shaving; he had the figure of an officer and the gait of an English sportsman. One felt when looking at him that he was a young man who preferred to exercise his limbs rather than his head, and cared most for those things which developed strength and physical activity, although he was well instructed, for he had learnt and was learning more every day; he studied with an intense application of mind everything that would be of use to him later on in life. He learnt by heart the dates in history, but unfortunately forgot the precepts of the facts, the elementary notions of political economy necessary for a deputy to know, the A. B. C. of sociology practiced by the ruling class.

Musadieu estimated him at once and mentally observed: "In a few years from now he will be a great man." Bertin appreciated his skill and his strength, they belonged to the same fencing classes, often hunted together, and frequently met when riding in the Bois, so that they had many tastes in common, and that instinctive free masonry which creates between two men an ever ready subject of conversation, as agreeable to one as to the other.

When the Marquis was introduced to Annette de

Guilleroy he at once suspected his aunt's wishes; after making her a low bow he looked her over, with the quick keen glance of an admirer.

He thought her pretty, and above all, full of great promise. His reign was so brilliant in the petticoat government that he had become a connoisseur on the debutantes' charms and could make a sure prediction as to their future, just like an expert when tasting wines that are too tart.

He only exchanged a few insignificant phrases with her, then sat down beside the Baroness de Corbelle, and chatted in a low voice.

The evening broke up early. When every one had left, and Annette was in bed, the lights put out and the servants gone up to their 1ooms, the Count tramped up and down the salon which was now dimly lit by two candles. The Countess de Guilleroy was half asleep on the divan, but he kept her there more than an hour, speaking of his hopes of the future, what attitude she should adopt, and how she must take precautions and provide against all schemes.

It was very late when he released her: he was delighted with his soirée and went to his room murmuring:

"*Je crois bien que c'est une affaire faite.*"

CHAPTER III

"WHEN are you coming, *mon ami?* I have not seen you for three whole days, and it seems so long. My child takes up a great deal of my time, but I cannot live without seeing you."

The artist who was drawing some outlines, still try-

ing to find a new subject, re-read the Countess' note, then opened the drawer of his desk and placed it with a heap of other letters that had piled up there since the beginning of their *liaison.*

Thanks to the facilities of their worldly life, they were able to see each other almost every day; from time to time she would go to the studio and sit for an hour or two in the same fauteuil where she had posed, while he continued his work, but as she did not wish to be talked about by the servants, she preferred for these daily *rendezvous,* these little drafts of love, to receive him at her home or to meet him at some reception. They contrived to arrange them in advance, and it all seemed perfectly natural to the Count.

Twice a week the artist with a few other friends dined at her home. On Monday he would visit her regularly in her box at the Opera, then they would make an appointment at such and such a house, where it appeared as if by chance they met at the same hour. He knew the evening she did not go out, so he would call and have a cup of tea with her, feeling when alone with her at her home how securely and tenderly he was lodged in her affection. He was so captured by the habit of finding her somewhere, of being near her for a few moments, of exchanging a few words and mingling their thoughts, that he felt, although the bright flame of his passion had a long time burnt down, he still had a constant wish to see her.

For three days he had not been to see his friends, he knew that Annette's return would cause some excitement. He was bored already, and felt slightly annoyed that they had not sent for him before, but he had decided that he would not be the first to make advances.

The Countess' letter raised his spirits like a whip. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon, he decided to go at once and call upon her, then he would see her before she went for her drive.

His valet quickly appeared in answer to his impatient ring.

"What's the weather like, Joseph?" he asked.

"Beautiful, sir."

"Warm?"

"No! sir."

"White waistcoat, blue coat, gray hat."

He always dressed in the height of fashion, but even though his clothes were made by the best tailor, it was the way he wore them and how he walked,— the tightened vest, the pale felt hat placed at a certain angle, that gave him an air of distinction, and showed at once that he was an artist, and a bachelor.

When he arrived at the house the servant told him that Madame was just dressing to take a drive in the Bois. He was annoyed and waited for her.

As usual he commenced to stride up and down, going from one lounge to another, from the windows to the walls in the great room darkened by the rich curtains. On the fragile tables with gilt feet were knick-knacks of all sorts, useless, pretty and costly things strewn about in artistic disorder; some small, old boxes of chased gold, miniature snuff-boxes, statuettes of ivory, then some objects in dull silver that were quite modern, peculiar, odd things distinctly of English origin — a small kitchen stove, a cat drinking from a saucepan, a cigarette case in the shape of a big loaf of bread, a coffee pot for matches, and then, in an antique casket, quite an assortment of dolls, collars, bracelets, rings,

brooches, earrings, of diamonds, sapphires, rubies and emeralds, microscopic fantasies, which looked as though they were made by Lilliputian jewelers.

Now and again he picked up an object that he had given her on some anniversary, he took it, turned it over and examined it, with absent-minded indifference then put it back in its place. In a corner, some rare books richly bound were opened in readiness to read on a *guéridon* supported by a column foot, which was conveniently placed before a little round sofa. On the stand was the *Revue des Deux-Mondes,* the book was slightly worn, the leaves dog-eared, as if it had been read many times, then there were other publications with leaves uncut; the *Arts Modernes,* that one subscribed to simply on account of the high price, the subscription being four hundred francs a year, and the *Feuille libre,* a small thin book with blue cover where the most recent poets,— called the *Enervés,* launch out. Between the windows stood the Countess' desk, a dainty bit of furniture of the XVIII Century, upon which she wrote her letters to him. Some works and familiar books were left on the desk which showed the mind and the heart of woman: *Musset, Manon Lescaut, Werther,* and to show that one was not a stranger to complicated sensations, and to the mysteries of psychology: *Les Fleurs au Mal, Le Rouge et le Noir, La Femme au XVIII siècle, Adolphe.* At the side of the books was placed a beautiful hand mirror, a masterpiece of the goldsmith's craft, the glass was laid down on a square of embroidered velvet, so that one could admire the curious work of gold and silver on the back of the mirror.

Bertin took the glass and looked into it. The last few years he had aged terribly, and although he con-

sidered his face had more character than formerly, he felt gloomy at the sight of his sagging cheeks, and the lines around his eyes. The door behind him opened and Annette's voice called out:

"Good morning, M. Bertin."

"Good morning, *petite,* how do you do?"

"Very well, thanks, and you?"

"And so you have decided not to '*tutoyer*' me?"

"No! really it would embarrass me."

"*Allons donc!*"

"Yes! it would, you intimidate me."

"How is that?"

"Because . . . well, because I consider you are not young enough or old enough for me to address you in the second person."

The painter laughed heartily.

"Before this reason then I shall not insist."

She suddenly blushed up to the roots of her hair and said confusedly:

"Mamma told me to say she would be down very soon, and to ask you if you would like to drive with us in the Bois de Boulogne."

"Yes! Certainly. Are you alone?"

"No, the Duchess de Mortemain is coming."

"I shall be delighted."

"Then will you excuse me a moment. May I go and put on my hat?"

"Go, *petite.*"

As she went out of the room the Countess entered, gowned, and veiled ready to start. She held out both hands to the artist.

"We never see you now, Olivier. What are you doing?" she said.

"I was afraid I might be in the way just at this moment."

The way in which she said "Olivier" expressed all her reproach and all her love.

"You are the sweetest woman in the world, Any," he said, moved by the intonation of his name.

Their little heart quarrel ended, her voice took its usual gay tone.

"We will go and call for the Duchess," she said, "and then have a lovely drive through the wood. Nanette must see it all. Come along, we are ready."

The landau was waiting for them at the carriage entrance. Bertin seated himself opposite the two women, and the carriage started in the midst of the horses pawing the ground under the sonorous archway.

All along the boulevard from the Madeleine it seemed that the gayety of the early spring had fallen on the people. The warm air and bright sunshine gave the men an air of *fête,* and the women a look of hope and love; it made the street urchins cut capers and the scullery maids put their baskets on the benches to run and play with their brothers the young ragamuffins, the *concierges* canary birds made their throats hoarse chattering their shrill, sweet welcome to the advent of spring: but the old worn-out horses, harnessed to the cabs went their usual dejected pace — their last worn-out trot.

"The glorious weather! how good it is to be alive," murmured the Countess.

Under the full daylight, the painter looked at them both — the mother and daughter. Decidedly they were different, and yet at the same time so alike — this one was so well the continuation of that one, made of

the same blood, the same flesh, animated with the same life. The likeness was strongest in the eyes, their wonderful eyes,— violet blue specked with black, the color so fresh and clear in the daughter's and slightly faded in the mother's; both fixed on him the same look when he spoke to them, that it seemed they must give the same reply. It seemed surprising when he made them laugh and chat that he had before him two distinct women,— one who had lived, and one who was going to live. One was a pretty, innocent girl, ready for love and luck, ignored and ignorant. She was sailing out of the harbor onto the waves like a ship, while the other was on her way back, after having crossed the existence — and loved. He felt touched when he thought it was he above all others whom she had chosen, and whom she still preferred, she who was so beautiful, sitting here with him in the landau, in the warm air of spring. As he threw his gratitude in a look, she seemed to know his thoughts and he felt her thanks in the light rustling of her gown against him. In his turn he said softly:

"Yes! the glorious weather."

When they had called at the rue de Varenne for the Duchess, they drove towards the Invalides, crossed the Seine, reached the Avenue des Champs-Elysées, then drove up toward the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, in the midst of a stream of carriages. Annette was now seated at the side of the artist, with her back to the horses. She looked with eager and naive eyes on the lines of carriages. From time to time, when the Duchess and the Countess acknowledged someone with a courteous bow, she asked quickly:

"Who is that?"

They named "les Polaiglin," or "les Puicelci," or

"la comtesse de Lochrist," or "la belle madame Mandelière." They drove up the noisy and crowded road and arrived at the Avenue du Bois-de-Boulogne. The line of carriages which was a little less thick than before the Arc de Triomphe seemed to struggle in an endless course. The cabs, landaus, heavy family carriages which were keeping the direct line, were suddenly outdistanced by a smart victoria, harnessed to a high-stepping trotter, carrying with a mad speed,— past all the rolling multitude, citizen or aristocrat, ahead of all classes, all hierarchies,— a young indolent woman, gowned in a light and dashing toilet, who threw behind to the occupants of the carriage as she was whirled past them, a strange perfume of an unknown flower.

"Quick! who is that lady?" asked Annette.

"I don't know," replied Bertin, while the Duchess and the Countess exchanged a smile.

The leaves were sprouting, the familiar nightingales of this Parisian garden were already singing in the young verdure. They broke the line as they neared the lake, and then, from carriage to carriage, there was an incessant exchange of bows and smiles, and cordial greetings when the wheels touched. The Duchess' head was bent all the time before the raised hats and the inclined bodies. She seemed to be passing a *revue,* and brought to her mind, all she knew, and all she supposed of the people as they filed before her.

"Look child, there is the beautiful Madame Mandelière, the beauty of the Republic."

In a light and smart victoria the beauty of the Republic let herself be admired, with apparent indifference for this unquestionable glory. She was very striking with her great sombre eyes, low forehead under a

casque of raven-black hair, and her determined mouth, which was a little too large.

"She is very beautiful," said Bertin.

The Countess did not like to hear him praise other women, she shrugged her shoulders and remained silent. But the young girl with the instinct of rivalry already awakened, said boldly:

"I don't think she is beautiful."

The artist turned to her. "You mean to say she is not lovely, *petite?*"

"No, she is not, most decidedly not, she looks as though she had been soaked in ink."

The Duchess laughed delightedly.

"Bravo, child, for the last six years half the men of Paris have knelt at the feet of that negress. Look rather at the Countess de Lochrist. There she is."

The Countess sat alone in her carriage with a white poodle beside her; she was blonde, with dark eyes and as dainty as a miniature. The fine lines which had shown for the last five or six years beneath her eyes were a theme of exclamations to her admirers. She passed with a bow and a fixed smile on her lips. But Nanette did not appear at all enthusiastic.

"No!" she said, shaking her head. "She is no longer very young."

In the various discussions they had had on these two rivals, Bertin did not speak up for the Countess, but he felt annoyed at this intolerance of a mere child.

"*Bigre!*" he said, "whether she is admired more or less, she is charming, and I sincerely hope you will grow as pretty as she is."

"Let her say what she likes," said the Duchess. "You only notice women when they are past thirty.

The *petite* is quite right. You only praise women who are no longer young."

"Pardon me, Duchess," he exclaimed, "a woman is not beautiful until late, not until all her expression is drawn out."

He explained how the first freshness of youth is only a varnish over the beauty which is ripening, he stated that men of the world do not make a mistake in paying little attention to young girls in all their freshness, and that they were right when they did not proclaim them beautiful, until the last stage of their blossoming.

The Countess was happy.

"He is right," she thought, "he judges as an artist, a fresh young face is very nice but just a little bit ordinary."

And the painter insisted, explaining at what moment a face, losing little by little the undefined grace of youth, takes its definite shape, its expression, its physiognomy.

At each word the Countess made "yes" with a little bend of her head, and the more he affirmed with the warmth of an advocate who pleads, with the animation of a suspect who sustains his cause, the more she approved by look and words, as if they were allied to strengthen each other against a danger, to defend themselves against a menacing and false opinion. Annette scarcely listened to them, she was too occupied in looking about. Her laughing face had become grave, she sat silent and dizzy with joy as she gazed on the moving throng. The sun, the trees, the carriages, all this beautiful, rich, gay life was to be hers. Every day she could come here and in her turn be acknowledged and envied, and men, when they saw her, would perhaps

say that she was beautiful. She noticed those whom she thought were the most distinguished-looking, and always asked their names, without occupying herself with other things, than the replies, which sometimes would awake in her an echo of respect and admiration, when she had read of them so much in the newspaper or in history. She had never seen so many celebrities and could hardly believe that they were real. It seemed as though she were a spectator at a performance. The cabs inspired her with a contempt mingled with disgust, they annoyed and irritated her.

"I think only private carriages should be allowed to come here," she remarked.

"*Eh! bien, Mademoiselle,* then what about our 'equality,' 'liberty' and 'fraternity,'" asked Bertin.

She made a little grimace which signified "*à d'autres*" and said: "There is a wood for the cabs, the Bois de Vincennes, for example."

"You are behind the times, *petite,* and you do not yet know that we are swimming in full democracy; besides, if you would like to see the Bois free of all this *mélange,* come in the morning, then you will only see the flowers, the choicest flowers of society."

Then he pictured to her, with the vividness that was his characteristic — the morning wood, with its cavaliers and horsewomen, this most select *rendezvous,* where everybody knew everybody by their names, pet names, relations, titles, qualities and vices, as though they all lived in the same *quartier* or in the same little town.

"Do you come here often?" she asked.

"Very often, it is the most delightful spot in Paris," he replied.

"You ride horseback in the morning?"

"Of course."

"And then in the afternoon you make calls?"

"Yes."

"Then when do you do your work?"

"Well, I work . . . sometimes, but then I have chosen a special line following my tastes. As I am a painter of beautiful women, I, of course, must see them all the time, and follow them about a little."

"On foot and horseback," she murmured without smiling.

He threw her an oblique and satisfied look which seemed to say: "*Tiens, tiens* already showing wit, in time you will do very well, little one."

A cold breeze from the great expanse of open country which had scarcely awakened to the springtime, swept over the beautiful, frivolous Bois. The leaves on the trees trembled, the women, all with the same movement drew their wraps, which had fallen *en arrière* over their shapely shoulders. The horses commenced to prance briskly up and down the *allées,* as if the sharp breeze had whipped them up in passing. They drove home quickly to the silvery-toned noise of the shaking curb chains, under the oblique golden rays of the setting sun.

"Are you going home?" asked Madame de Guilleroy of the artist, whose habits she well knew.

"No, I am going to the club."

"Then we will drop you there, *en passant.*"

"That will suit me. Many thanks."

"When are you going to invite us with the Duchess to take luncheon with you?" she asked.

"Whatever day you like," he answered.

The painter, appointed by the *Parisiennes* who had

baptized him a "Watteau realist" and whom the backbiters called the "photographer of cloaks and gowns," very often received at dinner and luncheon, the beautiful women whose features he had reproduced and many others besides, most of them celebrities; they were amused and thoroughly enjoyed these little fêtes, given in a bachelor's home.

"The day after to-morrow then, will that suit you, my dear Duchess?" asked Madame de Guilleroy.

"Yes! how charming of you to think of me. M. Bertin never includes me in his parties. A true sign that I am no longer young," she said.

The Countess who was in the habit of considering the artist's home almost as her own, said: "Only we four, '*les quatre du landau,*' the Duchess, Annette, you and I, *n'est-ce pas, grand artiste?*"

"Only just ourselves," he said, as he stepped out of the carriage, "and you shall eat some crawfish *à l'alsacienne.*"

"Oh! you will give *des passions* to the *petite.*"

He stood for a moment at the carriage to say good-bye, then walked quickly through the great door into the vestibule of the club. He threw his overcoat and cane to the group of footmen, who had risen like soldiers at the entrance of an officer, then walked up the wide staircase, passed before another brigade of attendants in knee-breeches, pushed open a door, and suddenly felt as sprightly as a young man, as he heard at the end of the corridor a continued noise of foils clashing, exclamations hurled by strong voices — "Touched!" "My turn!" "Passed!" "Touched!" "Your turn!"

In the *salle d'armes,* the fencers,— dressed in gray

canvas, with vests of skin, trousers tightened at the ankle, a sort of apron falling over the stomach, one arm in the air with hand bent, the other hand covered with an enormous glove holding the thin, supple blade,— stretched and straightened themselves with the brusque flexibility of mechanical puppets. Others were resting and talking; most of them were out of breath, perspiring, and mopping their foreheads and necks with handkerchiefs they held in their hands, others were looking on at the assaults, seated on the square divans arranged along the great room; there was Liverdy against Landa, and le *mâitre du Cercle,* Taillade, against big Rocdiane.

Bertin smiling, shook hands with the men. "I challenge you," he cried to the Baron de Baverie.

"I'm yours, *mon cher,*" replied the Baron.

He passed on into the dressing-room to change his suit. It was a long time since he had felt in such good form, and knowing that he was going to make a splendid attack, he threw off his clothes with all the impatience of a school boy. As soon as he had his opponent before him, he attacked him with the utmost ardor. In ten minutes he had touched him eleven times, and thoroughly tired him out, so that he was obliged to crave quarters. Then he challenged Punisimont, and when he was through with him, his fellow artist,— Amaury Maldant.

The cold *douche* afterwards chilled his panting flesh and reminded him of the time when he was twenty years old, when, on the hot summer afternoons he used to jump from the bridges in the *environs* of Paris, and duck his head into the Seine while the gaping peasants looked on in astonishment.

"Going to dine here?" asked Maldant.

"Yes."

"We have a table with Liverdy, Rocdiane, and Landa. Get a move on, it's quarter of seven now."

There was a buzz of conversation when they entered the dining-room which was already crowded with men. There were all the vagrant "nighters" of Paris, the unoccupied and the occupied, all those who, after seven o'clock of an evening, can do nothing but dine at the club and hang upon the chance of meeting someone or something.

When the five friends were seated at the table, Liverdy, the banker, a strong, thick-set man of forty years, said to Bertin: "You seemed possessed with the devil this evening."

"Yes," replied the painter, "to-day I did astonishing things."

The others smiled, and Amaury Maldant, the landscape painter, a thin, little, baldheaded man with a gray beard, said slyly: "I also have a return of strength in April, just enough to make me grow a few branches, a half a dozen at the most, then it flows off into sentiment."

The Marquis de Rocdiane and the Count de Landa pitied him, both of them were older than he, although they did not look so, but it was impossible to guess their ages. Both were club-men, horsemen, and sportsmen, and constant exercise had made their bodies as flexible as steel. They boasted of being even younger than the enervated idlers of the new generation.

Rocdiane was of high birth, and frequented all the smartest *salons,* but he had been suspected of underhanded dealings in money matters of all kinds; he passed a great deal of his time in the gambling houses;

he was married and separated from his wife, but she allowed him an income, he was an administrator of Belgian and Portuguese estates. He carried haughtily on his energetic Don Quixote face the slightly tarnished honor of a gentleman, which he cleansed from time to time with blood from a duel wound.

The Count de Landa, a good-natured giant, proud of his stature and his shoulders, could not make up his mind to dine at home more than three times a week; on the other days after the *séance* of the fencing class, he stayed at the club with his friends. "The club is a family," he said, "the family for those who have not any, for those who will never have any, and for those who are bored with what they have."

The conversation started about women — anecdotes were told, boasts were made, and indiscreet confidences whispered.

The Marquis de Rocdiane spoke freely about his mistresses. They were society women and although he did not mention their names, from his precise indications, it was quite easy for them to guess. The banker Liverdy designated his by their Christian names; he would make the remark: "Just at that time I was at the best with the wife of a diplomat, and just as I was leaving her one evening, I said to her: 'Now, my little Marguerite, I . . .'" he stopped, as they all smiled, then exclaimed: "*Hein!* What have I said? *Mon Dieu!* one ought to get in the habit of calling all women by the name of Sophie."

Olivier Bertin was always very reserved, when they questioned him, he invariably gave them the same reply: "Oh! I am quite content with my models."

They pretended to believe him, and Landa, a rover

after street girls, was exalted at the thought of all the pretty "bits" who were walking about the streets, and the young girls who would pose before the painter for ten francs an hour.

In proportion, as the bottles emptied, all these *grisons* as they were called by the younger members of the club, became more and more animated, their faces were flushed, their voices thick and their eyes reddened with passionate desires.

After the coffee, Rocdiane let fall some more veracious indiscretions, and forgot his *mondaines* to boast about the ordinary *cocotte*. "Paris," he said, as he held up a glass of kummel, "is the only town where a man does not get old, the only city where, at the age of fifty years,— providing he is strong and in good health,— he can always find a little girl of eighteen years, as pretty as an angel, to love him."

Landa, after the cordials, agreed with Rocdiane, mentioning the *petites filles* who loved him every day.

But Liverdy, more skeptic and pretending to know exactly the worth of women, murmured: "Of course, they tell you that they love you."

"Why, they prove it to me, my dear fellow," replied Landa smartly.

"Puh! those proofs don't count for anything."

"They're all I want," he said chuckling.

Rocdiane cried out: "*Sacrebleu!* but they themselves think it, do you think that a pretty little *gueuse* of twenty years, who for five or six years has been going around seeing life — the life of Paris — where all our mustaches have taught her, and spoilt for her the taste of kisses, do you think she still knows how to distinguish a man of thirty from a man of sixty?

Allons donc! Quelle blague! She has seen too much and knows too much. Listen! I bet you that at the bottom of her heart she prefers the old banker to a young idiot. Have men an age here? *Eh! mon cher,* we get younger when our hair whitens, and the whiter it is the more they say they love us, and the more they show it, the more we believe it."

They rose up from the table overfed and excited by the alcohol — ready for all conquests, and they began to deliberate how to pass the evening. Bertin wanted the circus,— Rocdiane the Hippodrome,— Maldant the Eden, and Landa the Folies-Bergère, when the sound of violins being tuned up in the distance came to them.

"*Tiens!* there is music at the club to-night," said Rocdiane.

"Yes!" replied Bertin, "suppose we stay here for ten minutes before going out."

All agreed. They walked across the *salon,* billiard room and card room, then arrived in a sort of box *en face* the gallery of musicians. Four men lounging in the armchairs were waiting with a meditative air, while down below in the center of the rows of empty chairs were a dozen others, some seated, some standing.

The conductor of the orchestra tapped on his desk with his stick.

Olivier Bertin adored music as some men adore opium. It made him dream. The full, rich notes of the instruments moved him strangely, he felt carried away in a sort of nervous intoxication which made his body and his intelligence vibrate incredibly. His imagination rushed wildly on, maddened by the melodies, across soft dreams and sweet reveries; with closed

eyes, and arms loosely folded, he listened to the beautiful strains, and saw things which passed before his eyes and in his spirit.

The orchestra played a symphony by Hayden, and the painter, as his eyelids dropped over his eyes, saw again the Bois, the streams of carriages, and opposite to him in the landau, the Countess and her child. He heard their voices, listened to their words, felt the swaying of the carriage, and breathed the air full of the fresh odor of the spring leaves.

Three times his companions spoke to him, and interrupted the vision, he answered them, and then closed his eyes again, and the vision returned and the swaying movement of the carriage recommenced, just as the motion of the rolling boat comes to us as we lie in the immobility of our bed after a long voyage on the sea. Then he went far away, on a long journey, but always with the two women, sometimes they were in a railway carriage seated opposite him, sometimes at foreign hotels. All through the melodies the orchestra played, they were by his side, as if during the drive in the spring sunshine they had left the image of their two faces impressed in the depths of his eyes.

A silence — then the noise of moving chairs and voices chased away the dream vapor and instead — he saw around him his four companions fast asleep in their chairs. He woke them all up.

"Now then, wake up! What's the next move?" he said, poking each in turn.

"I'd like to stay where I am and sleep a little longer," replied Rocdiane, only half awake.

"I should too," said Landa, drowsily.

"And I . . . And I . . ."

"*Eh bien!* I'm going home," said Bertin, getting up. "I feel tired."

He felt just the reverse. He was wide awake, and very animated, but he wanted to leave them for he knew too well how the evenings finished round the gambling tables of the club.

So he went home, and the next day,— after a night of nerves, one of those nights which puts the artist into a state of brain activity, which is baptized "Inspiration,"— he decided not to go out, but to work all day.

His day was excellent, one of those days of easy production, when the ideas of his brain, seemed to slide down to his hand, and fix themselves on the canvas. He was shut in from the world: the doors were closed to everyone, and he was alone in the dark, friendly peace of the studio. With clear eye, and mind lucid and alert, he tasted that happiness which is given to the few artists only, who bring forth their work in joyfulness. During these hours of work nothing existed for him but the piece of canvas, where an image was being created under the caress of his brush, and he felt in this work of fruitfulness, a strange and happy sensation of the fullness of life which intoxicates and envelopes us. By the evening he was tired out, but it was a healthy fatigue and he went to bed happy, with the pleasant thoughts of his friend and the party on the morrow.

The table was covered with flowers, the menu carefully chosen, for Madame de Guilleroy was a *petite gourmande raffinée.* When the champagne was brought on the table, there was an energetic, but short resistance, the painter insisted and finally carried the day.

"But the *petite* will be drunk," cried the Countess.

"*Mon Dieu!* She will have to be the first time," said the Duchess indulgently.

They were obliged to leave soon after luncheon, as the Duchess and the Countess had a meeting at the *Comité des Mères Françaises,* and they had to take Annette home before going to the *Société,* but Bertin offered to walk to the Boulevard Malesherbes with her and the two went off together.

"Let us go by the longest way," she said.

"How would you like to stroll through the Parc Monceau, it is so pretty there now. We will look at the kiddies and their *nounous.*"

"Yes. I should like to."

They crossed over the Avenue Vélasquez and passed through the monumental gilt gate, which serves as ensign and entrance to this lovely little park — displaying in the center of Paris, in the midst of the princely homes — its artificial and verdant grace. Along the wide *allées* which stretched across the lawns, and the groups of trees and flowers, a crowd of men and women were seated on the iron chairs, watching the people as they strolled up and down; in the little shady paths, winding like a stream, a group of children crawled in the sand, ran or played with a skipping rope, under the indifferent eye of the nurse, or the careful look of the mother.

The immense trees rounded off in domes, like monuments of leaves, the giant chestnut-trees with their weighty verdure splashed with red and white clusters of blossoms, the conspicuous sycamores, the decorative palm-trees with their trunks skillfully warped made a

lovely perspective of the sloping and undulating grassplots.

It was warm. The turtledoves warbled in the foliage and made little rounds of visits flying from the top of one tree to another, while below, the chirruping sparrows bathed themselves in the *arc-en-ciel,* sprinkling a shower of sunlit water drops on the fresh green grass around. On their pedestals the white statues gleam and stand out boldly against the new green foliage — here is a youth in marble pulling out from his foot an imaginary thorn, as though he had been pricked a while ago when chasing Diana as she flew towards the little lake enclosed in the thickets, which shelter the ruin of a temple. Other statues are embracing,— cold lovers! at the foot of the great trees, others are dreaming as they hold their knee in their hands, a cascade froths, and tumbles on the pretty grotto, a tree, truncated like a column holds up a clinging ivy, a tomb bears an inscription. This beautiful little park no more recalls the wild forest, than the heap of stones piled up on the grassplots recalls the Acropolis.

Olivier Bertin walked along silently beside Annette, he was too preoccupied to talk to her; he was looking at the variegated colors, at the moving life of the garden.

"Oh! the little love," cried Annette.

A small boy with golden curls had stopped in his play to look up at her with his big blue eyes filled with childish admiration.

"Isn't he a darling?" she exclaimed.

Then she passed a *revue* of all the little children, and the joy that she had in seeing these live dolls, their

bonny faces, and pretty frocks and ribbons made her chatter and become very communicative. She walked slowly on making remarks to Bertin about the little ones, their nurses and their mothers. The fine, healthy children brought forth exclamations of delight, and the pale, weakly ones, some soft words of pity. He listened to her far more amused at what she said, than with the antics of the youngsters.

"It is beautiful," he said, thinking of his work, and what an exquisite picture a corner of the park with a group of mothers, nurses and children would make. Why had he not thought of it before?

"You like the youngsters?" he asked.

"I adore them."

She seemed as though she wanted to take them up and kiss and fondle them, it was the maternal and tender desire of a future mother: and as he looked at her he wondered at the secret instinct hidden in the heart of woman.

As she was inclined to talk, he questioned her about her tastes; she admitted her hopes for worldly success, and glory, in pretty, naive manner: she wanted beautiful horses, she knew almost as much about them as a horse-dealer: the greater part of the farms of Roncières were given over to horse-breeding. She did not seem to trouble herself about a *fiancé* any more than about an apartment which one so easily finds in the multitude of *étages* to let.

As they neared the lake, two swans and six ducks came slowly swimming along, looking as clean and as calm as though they were china birds. Just by the side of the lake a young woman was sitting in a chair,

an opened book on her knees, her eyes looking straight before her, her soul flown away in a reverie.

She sat there looking as still as a wax figure. Homely, humble, dressed in a modest manner, as one who does not think to attract — a nursery governess perhaps — she had started on the journey for the Dream, carried on her way by a phrase, or a word that had touched her heart. She continued without doubt, in the direction of her own hopes, the romance commenced in the book.

Bertin looked at her in surprise. "How beautiful it is to be lost like that," he said.

They passed before her, then returned and passed again, but she did not notice them. She had gone so far on her long flight of thought.

The artist turned to Annette.

"*Dis donc! petite,*" he said, "would it annoy you to pose for me, once or twice?"

"Why no! on the contrary, I should be very pleased," she answered.

"Look well at that girl then, who is walking in the Ideal."

"There on the chair?"

"Yes! Well, you will sit like that on a chair with an opened book on your knees and you will try to do like she is doing. Have you ever dreamed, while awake?"

"Why, yes."

"What about?"

He tried to make her confess what she saw when she took her flight into the clouds, but she would not reply, she evaded his questions, turned her head away,

and looked at the ducks swimming after the pieces of bread that a woman was throwing to them, she seemed confused as though he had touched a sensitive chord in her nature. Then, to change the subject, she began to tell him about her life at Roncières, she spoke of her grandmother and told him that she read to her several hours every day, and she was afraid she would be very lonely and sad now she had left her.

As the painter listened to her, he felt as gay as a bird, gayer than he had ever been before. All that she said to him,— all the small and frivolous details of the simple life of a young girl amused and interested him.

"Let us sit down," he said.

They sat down near the water and the swans came to the border of the lake hoping to get some bread crumbs.

Bertin felt some distant remembrances come back to him, remembrances of by-gone years, that had been drowned in forgetfulness, but were now returning to life. What makes them return, like this? We do not know.

They sprang up quickly, all kinds of old memories, and so numerous that it seemed as though a hand was moving the casket of his memory. He wondered why his old life was bubbling up like this — memories had rushed back to his brain many times before but never so forcibly as now. There was always a cause for these sudden evocations — a material and simple cause — a sound, a smile, a perfume. How many times a woman's dress with the evaporated breath of an essence had awakened within him a crowd of memories! Sometimes at the bottom of an old bottle of perfume,

he had found bits of his existence, and all the odors that came to him by chance, those of the street, the field, the houses, the furniture — both sweet and foul — the warm odors of a summer evening, the cold odors of a winter night, often revived some far gone reminiscence, as if the fragrance kept the dead things embalmed, like the aromatics which conserve mummies. What is it now? Is it the damp grass, or the chestnut blossom recalling his past? No! then what? Is it something he has seen, which is bringing back his youth? What has he seen? Nothing.

Among the people they had passed, one of them perhaps resembled a long lost face, and unconsciously had fastened on his heart the hand glass of the past, or, perhaps it was some sound.

Very often the chance soft notes of a piano, an unknown voice, or even a street-organ playing some old fashioned air had brusquely taken him back to his boyhood, making his chest heave with forgotten emotions. But this continual recall, so incessant and unseizurable, almost annoyed him. There was something around him — near to him, that was reviving his dead emotions.

" It is getting a little cold," he said. " Shall we walk on? "

They got up and continued their way.

He looked at the poor people sitting on the benches, those to whom a two *sous* chair was a luxury. Annette looked at them also and wondered pityingly what their life was and what work they did. She wondered why, if they were so poor, they could idle their time away in the beautiful public park.

And all the time the artist sees the years that have

glided by. It seems as if a fly were buzzing in his ears, and filling them with confused murmurs of days that are no more.

The young girl, seeing that he was dreaming, asked:

"What is the matter? You look so sad."

Then he trembled right to his heart. Who said it? She or her mother? Not her mother with the voice of the present, but her mother with her voice of the past,—her youthful voice which had changed, though he knew it, and it made him tremble.

He smiled at her, as he replied:

"There is nothing the matter. You amuse me ever so much, you are so pretty, and you recall to me your mother."

How was it he had not understood quicker this strange echo of lost words, which were coming to him now from new lips?

"Speak again," he said.

"What about?"

"Anything. Tell me what your governesses taught you, did you like them?"

She began to chatter.

He listened to her and felt an increasing disquietude, he watched and waited amidst the phrases of this little girl who was almost a stranger to his heart, for a word, a sound, a laugh which seemed to have been put in her baby throat, when her mother was young, and had stayed there.

Occasionally, an intonation of the voice would move him strangely. Between their words there was some dissimilarity which he had not at first noticed, but this difference only made the brusque awakening of her mother's speech the more forceful. Up to now he had

only noticed with a curious and pleased eye the resemblance of their faces, but now the mystery of this resurrected voice, mixed them in such a way, that when he turned his head from her so as not to look at her, he asked himself if it was not her mother speaking thus to him, as she did twelve years ago.

Then, when disillusioned by this evocation, he turned back again to her, he felt again, at meeting her look, a trembling as he had felt when looking into her mother's eyes, in the first days of their love.

Three times they had walked around the park, passing again the same persons, the same *nounous;* the same children. Annette was looking at the large houses which surround the park and asked him the names of the people who lived in them. She wanted to know everything about everybody, she questioned him with an eager curiosity, seeming to fill up her woman's memory with information, and her eyes brightened with interest; she seemed to hear with her eyes, as much as her ears.

When they reached the pavilion which separates the two doors from the outside boulevard, Bertin looked at the clock, the hand pointed to four o'clock.

"We must go home now," he said.

And they walked leisurely to the Boulevard Malesherbe. When he left her he continued his way towards the Place de la Concorde, intending to make a visit on the other side of the Seine. He hummed as he walked along, he wanted to run, he felt so young and alert. Paris seemed to him more beautiful than ever.

"Decidedly," he thought, smiling, "the springtime gives a fresh coating of paint to us all."

He was experiencing that sentiment when the excited

mind feels and understands everything with a greater pleasure. The eye sees better, appears clearer and more impressionable, one feels a keener joy in looking around, the sense of taste, smell, and touch is quickened, as if an almighty hand had come and refreshened all the colors of the earth and re-animated the movements of all its beings, had wound the activities of our sensations just as we should wind up a clock that has stopped.

As he looked about him, he noticed hundreds of interesting, amusing things.

"How strange," he said, "to think that there are moments when I do not know what subject to paint. He felt his intelligence so free and so discerning, that all his work of an artist appeared to him commonplace, and he conceived a new way to express life, more real, more original; and suddenly he was seized with the wish to return home and work; he would go back and shut himself up in his studio.

But as soon as he was alone before his canvas, this ardor, which had so excited his blood only a little while ago, suddenly cooled, and he felt weary as he sat down on the sofa and began to dream again.

That sort of happy indifference in which he lived, that carelessness of a satisfied man, who has all his needs appeased slowly left him, and he felt vaguely that something was missing.

As he looked around his room, it seemed as though in the gathering shadows he saw the form of a woman whose presence seemed to soothe him.

It was so long since he had felt the impatience of a lover who awaits the return of a mistress, and suddenly he felt how far off his friend was, and wanted her near

him with all the passion of a young man. He thought of how long they had loved each other, and he found in this vast room where she had come so often innumerable reminiscences of her — her ways — her words — her kisses. He recalled certain happy days, hours, and moments, and he seemed to feel around him the fondling of her old caresses. He got up and walked about, and thought again, that in spite of this friendship which had filled his life, he was always alone — always lonely.

After long, tedious hours of work, when he had put his brush and palette aside and looked around him dazed with the awakening of a man who enters again into life, he saw and felt only the cold walls, the inanimate objects.

Sometimes, in certain hours of tender emotion, he had suffered cruelly not to be able to take his sweetheart in his arms and keep her with him — then, as time went by and his ardor abated, he had accepted without revolt their separation, and his liberty. And now the regrets had come again, it was as though the old love was coming back. It was strange, this return of tenderness, enveloping him so abruptly almost without a cause, just because the spring had come and all was glorious again and possibly because he had heard his sweetheart's voice made young again. What small things can move a man's heart — a man who is getting old, and who remembers the happy past. As of old the wish to see her came strong upon him, his heart throbbed and sent the blood rushing warmly through his veins. He thought of her now as a young lover would, and felt impatient to see her. He would go

and see her this evening, although they had met only in the morning. He would call and take a cup of tea with her.

The hours seemed long to him. As he walked from his home to the Boulevard Malesherbe, a sharp pain gripped him for fear she would not be at home, and he would have to pass the evening again alone,—*alone* as he had passed so many others.

At his inquiry: "Is the Countess at home?" the footman replying: "Yes, sir," his heart bounded with joy.

He stood for a moment on the threshold of the little *salon,* where the two women were working under the light of the rose pink lamp shades, a work-stand in English metal, covered with work, before them.

"Here I am again," he said gayly.

The Countess cried out:

"*You!* What luck!"

"*Oui, c'est moi.* I felt very lonely, and so I came."

"Ah! that is nice."

"Are you expecting anyone?"

"No! perhaps! . . . I never know." . . .

He sat down and looked disdainfully at the gray work in coarse wool that they were knitting with long wooden knitting needles.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Some coverlets."

"For the poor?"

"Of course."

"They are *very* ugly."

"They are *very* warm."

"Possibly, but they are ugly all the same, specially

in a Louis XV room, where everything attracts the eye. You ought to make prettier gifts for your friends."

"*Mon Dieu!* how like a man," she said shrugging her shoulders." At this time, everyone is making this sort of coverlet."

"I know it only too well. One cannot call and see anyone of an evening without noticing these awful gray rags trailing across pretty dresses and dainty furniture; verily, this springtime you show poor taste in your charity."

To judge if what he said was true, the Countess spread out her work on the silk covered chairs at the side of her, then she said frankly:

"Yes! it really is very ugly," and she began to work again.

The pink light from the double chimney lamps, shed its rays on the two heads bent side by side over their work, the rosy glimmer creeping through their loosely waved hair and diffusing itself on their faces, their dresses, and their moving hands.

They looked lightly at their work, as women do who are well accustomed to needle work, using their fingers quickly — the eye following without the mind thinking. In each corner of the room stood four other lamps of Chinese porcelain, on old pedestals of carved gilt wood, which threw out over the silken hangings a clear, regular light, softened by the transparent lace thrown over the globes.

Bertin seated himself in a very low chair — a tiny armchair — in which he could just manage to sit, but he always preferred when chatting with the Countess to sit almost at her feet.

"So you had a long walk with Nané in the park this afternoon," she said.

"Yes! we talked like old friends," he answered. "I like your daughter so much, she is very like you: When she is pronouncing certain phrases one would think you had forgotten your voice in her mouth."

"My husband has said that to me very often," she replied.

He looked at them working together bathed in the lamp-light, and the thought which made him suffer so often, which he had been suffering this same day came again — the loneliness of his silent, cold home — cold, no matter what weather, even when the fires were roaring in the grates, even when the bright summer sun shone in the room, the home was empty and cold — to-night as he looked at the two women, he felt the atmosphere of *the home* and his own solitude.

How much he would rather be this woman's husband than her lover. In the days gone by he had wanted so often to run off with her, to take her away from her husband, to steal her completely. To-day he was jealous of this man whom they had deceived, who was installed so near her, in the habits of her home, the contact of her touch, for always.

Looking at her to-night he felt his heart filled with the old love, and he wanted to tell her of this awakening, which would make her so happy; he was annoyed that Annette was there and hoped she would send the child to bed as soon as possible. He wanted to be alone with her, to get nearer to her and lay his head on her knees, take her hands in his, and put the coverlet for the poor, the wooden needles and the ball of wool, which had rolled under a chair — to one side.

He looked at the clock again and again, and scarcely spoke. It was absurd to let a young girl pass the whole of the evening with her elders.

Footsteps broke the silence of the outer *salon* and the servant appeared in the doorway and announced:

"M. de Musadieu."

Olivier Bertin felt a repressed rage, and when he shook hands with the *Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts* he felt he would like to take him by the shoulders and throw him out again.

Musadieu was full of news: the ministry was going to fall, and there was a whispered scandal about the Marquis de Rocdiane.

"I will tell you all about it later on," he said looking towards Annette.

The Countess looked at the clock and saw that ten o'clock was going to strike.

"It is time to go to bed, my child," she said, turning to Annette.

Without replying Annette folded up her work, rolled up the ball of wool, kissed her mother on each cheek, shook hands with the men, and then quietly left the room.

"Now then, your scandal," said the Countess when the door had closed.

It appeared that the Marquis de Rocdiane, amicably separated from his wife, who allowed him an income which he considered insufficient, had found a sure and singular way to double it. At his orders she had been watched, and they had the surest proof of her guilt, so he had bought a larger income by the official report that had been made out by the *commissaire de police.*

The Countess listened,— interested, her hands idle and her interrupted work on her lap.

Since Annette had left the room, Bertin had become quite exasperated with Musadieu. At this scandal, he turned on him fiercely, and affirmed with the indignation of a man who would not speak to any one of such a calumny — that it was an odious lie, one of those shameful back-biting tales that people ought not to repeat, or even to listen to.

He was standing with his back to the fireplace, in the threatening attitude of a man who is disposed to make of the story a personal question.

Rocdiane was his friend, and, if, in certain respects, one could reproach him with levity one could not accuse him, or even suspect him of any action that was really criminal.

Musadieu was surprised at this attack. He tried to vindicate himself, collected his thoughts and commenced excuses.

"Pardon me," he said; "but I heard it mentioned just now at the Duchess de Mortemain's."

"Who told you? A woman, I suppose," said Bertin.

"No! it was not, it was the Marquis de Farandal."

"Bah! it doesn't surprise me, coming from him," said the painter.

There was a silence. The Countess took up her work. Then Olivier continued in a calmer voice:

"I *know* that it is false."

Musadieu was preparing for a retreat, feeling that he had trodden on dangerous ground, and he was just saying that he had a visit to make at the Corbelles, when M. de Guilleroy came in, having just returned from a dinner *en ville*.

Bertin sat down despairingly. It was impossible to get rid of the husband as soon as he came in, and Musadieu — bah!

"Have you heard about this awful scandal?" commenced M. de Guilleroy.

No one replied.

"It appears," he continued, "that Rocdiane surprised his wife in a criminal act, and is making her pay dearly for the indiscretion."

Then Bertin, with a disconsolate air, and with grief in his voice and manner, laid a hand on Guilleroy's knee, and repeated in a quieter tone the words he had just flung in Musadieu's face. And the Count almost convinced, was annoyed to think that he had related so lightly, such a serious and compromising thing. He pleaded his ignorance and innocence. As he said, one heard so many tales that were absolutely false and wicked; they all agreed that the world surmises and calumniates with deplorable facility, and all four were of the opinion that most of the tales whispered about, were lies,— that women never had the lovers that one supposed, and that men never committed the infamies that were credited to them, and that on the surface everything was much uglier than beneath.

Since Guilleroy had appeared on the scene, Bertin felt that he had no real grudge against Musadieu, so he drew him into the conversation again and said a few flattering things to him which opened the sluice of his eloquence; and the Count seemed contented, like a man who brings with him peace and cordiality.

Two servants came into the room carrying a tea-table and boiling water steaming in a pretty brass tea kettle, over the blue flame of a spirit lamp. The

Countess got up and made the tea, preparing it with the same care and attention as the Russians, then she offered a cup to Musadieu, another to Bertin and passed round plates of *foies gras* sandwiches, and small Austrian and English pastries.

M. de Guilleroy walked up to the tea-table which held also a row of bottles containing various cordials and syrups. He made himself a stiff grog and discreetly disappeared in the next room.

Once more Bertin found he had only to deal with Musadieu, and once more he wanted to push him outside. He had recovered his nerve, and was holding forth again, scattering anecdotes, repeating talk, and jokes. The painter kept his eyes on the clock, whose hands were approaching midnight. Madame de Guilleroy saw his look and understood. She showed the tact of a woman of the world, who can quickly and imperceptibly change the tone of a light conversation and the general atmosphere of the room, and make it understood without words, that one should go or stay. By her manner only, by the look on her face and the weariness of her eyes, she spread a chilliness around her, as though she had just opened a window.

Musadieu felt the draught of cold air cooling his ideas, and without asking himself why he suddenly thought it was time to go, he got up.

Bertin, by good breeding, followed his example and the two men walked across the *salons* followed by the Countess who continued chatting to the artist. At the entrance of the hall she detained him a moment to explain something, while Musadieu was helped into his coat by a footman. As Madame de Guilleroy was still

speaking with Bertin the *Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts* having waited a few minutes at the door leading on to the staircase, which was held open to him by another domestic, decided to go out alone, rather than stand face to face with a valet.

The door closed gently behind him, and Madame de Guilleroy said to the artist in a perfectly natural manner:

"But why are you in such a hurry? It is not yet midnight. Won't you stay a little longer?"

And together they walked back to the little *salon*.

As soon as they were seated, he said:

"*Dieu!* how that animal annoys me."

"But why?"

"He takes you away from me."

"Oh! not very much."

"But he irritates me."

"You are jealous."

"It is not being jealous to find a man a bore."

He had seated himself again in the little armchair, and was quite near to her now; he held a piece of the lace on her gown between his fingers, and he told her of the strong emotion he had felt all the afternoon and evening.

She listened to him surprised and delighted, and laid her hand gently on his white hair, which she stroked softly as though to thank him.

"I would like so much to live always with you, Any," he murmured. He thought of her husband who had gone to bed, sleeping without doubt in the room that led out of hers.

"There is only marriage that can unite two lives," he said.

"*Mon pauvre ami,*" she said full of pity for him, and also for herself.

He had laid his cheek on her knees and was looking up at her tenderly; in his tenderness there was mingled a shade of melancholy and sorrow, he had less ardor than a while ago, when he was separated from her by her daughter, husband, and Musadieu.

She ran her slim fingers through his hair, and said with a smile:

"*Dieu!* how white you are, your last black hairs have gone."

"Alas! I know it. They go quickly," he said.

Afraid that she had saddened him, she said:

"Oh! but you were gray when you were quite young, since I have known you, it has always been a pepper and salt shade."

"Yes! that is true."

So as to efface the shade of regret that she had provoked, she raised his head between her two hands, and gave him two slow, tender kisses on the forehead, those long kisses which seem as though they could never finish. Then they looked into each other's eyes trying to see in the depths the reflection of their love.

"How I should like to pass the whole day with you, dear."

He felt vaguely tormented by this inexplicable need of friendship.

Only a short while ago he thought that if the others would leave them, and he could be alone with her that it would be sufficient to realize this desire which had awakened since the morning, and now that he was alone with his mistress and could feel on his forehead

How white you are, your last black hairs have gone.

the warmth of her hands and through her dress the warmth of her body, he still felt the same disquietude, the same longing for this unknown and fleeting love. So he thought perhaps outside the house, in the woods perhaps, where they could be quite alone this turmoil of his heart would be satisfied and calmed.

"What a child you are," she said, "why, we see each other every day."

He begged her to arrange some way to have luncheon with him outside Paris, somewhere in the country, as they had done several times before.

She was surprised at this caprice which was so difficult to realize now that her daughter had returned. She would try however, for her husband was going to Roncière, but it could not be until after the *Vernissage* which would take place the following Saturday.

"And from now to then," he said, "when shall I see you?"

"To-morrow night at the Corbelles. And if you are free on Thursday, come here at 3 o'clock, then I think we shall be able to dine together on Friday with the Duchess.

"It is understood then."

He got up to go.

"Adieu, Any."

"Adieu, *mon ami.*"

He stayed beside her, standing up, as though he could not decide to go, for he had wanted to say so much to her, and had hardly found anything to say.

"Adieu," he said again taking both her hands in his.

"Adieu, mon ami."

"I love you," he said.

She gave him one of those smiles, where in a second a woman can show to a man all that she has given up for him.

With heart beating, he repeated for the third time. "Adieu." And then left her.

CHAPTER IV

IT seemed as though all the carriages in Paris were making a pilgrimage to the *Palais de l' Industrie.* Since nine o'clock in the morning they had been arriving from all routes by the streets, avenues, and bridges towards this market of the *Beaux-Arts* where the *Tout Paris artiste* had invited the *Tout-Paris mondain* to assist at the first day of the opening of the Salon,—the exhibition of 3,400 pictures.

The tail end of a crowd was pushing through the doors, and disdaining the sculpture, was hurrying above to the gallery of painting.

In the square *salon* there was a swarm of noisy people. The painters *en représentation* until the evening made themselves known by their activity, the loudness of their voices and the authority of their manner. They began by pulling their friends by the sleeve towards the pictures, which they described with great flourishing of their arms, exclamations, and the energetic mimicry of connoisseurs.

There were all sorts of artists — big men of ungainly forms, with long hair and wearing soft gray or black hats. Others were small, active, thin — or thick-set, with loosely knotted foulard ties, a jacket suit or sacked up in those odd sort of suits which are characteristic of a certain class of artist.

There was a clique of distinguished artists,— artists of the boulevards, the clan of the academies, decorated with red rosettes, some large, some microscopic, according to their conception of good taste and *bon ton.* Then the clan of the *bourgeois* painters, the father surrounded with his family like a triumphal choir.

On entering the square *salon,* where the pictures that had been admitted to the honor of this room were hung, the eyes were dazzled by the brilliancy of color. The full light streaming from above brought out the radiancy of their tones, the glitter of the frames and showed up a crudity of new colors under the glaze of the varnish.

The portrait of the President of the Republic was opposite the door, while on another wall was a general decked out with gold lace, wearing a hat trimmed with ostrich plumes, and pantaloons of red cloth; at the side some naked nymphs under a weeping willow; and a ship in distress almost engulfed by a wave; an ancient priest excommunicating a barbarous king; a street of the Orient full of rotting dead; and a shadow of Dante on a visit to hell. Then again in this immense room one sees a charge of cavalry; some sharp-shooters in a wood; cows in the pasture lands; two lords of the XIX century fighting a duel at the corner of a street; a crazy woman sitting on a mile-stone; a priest administering the last sacrament to a dying man; some reapers; some rivers; a setting sun; a moonlight night; in fact a sample of everything that an artist makes, that he has made, and that he will make, up to the last day of the world.

Olivier stood in the midst of a group of celebrated artists, members of the Institute and the Jury, exchang-

ing opinions with them. An uneasiness oppressed him, an anxiety as regards the picture he had exhibited, which, in spite of the congratulations he had received, he did not feel was a success.

He left the group of men and went quickly forward. The Duchess de Mortemain had just arrived.

"Is the Countess here?" she asked him.

"I have not seen her yet."

"And M. de Musadieu?"

"No! I think not."

"He promised me that at ten o'clock he would be at the top of the staircase to escort me through the rooms," she said.

"Will you allow me to replace him?" Bertin asked.

"No! No! Your friends need you. We will see you later on. I believe we are having luncheon together."

Musadieu came hurrying up. He had been detained several minutes at the statuary, and excused himself. He was breathless, as he said:

"This way Duchess, we will go by here, beginning at the right. Come along."

They disappeared in a whirl of heads, as Madame de Guilleroy holding her daughter's arm, came in looking for Olivier Bertin.

He saw them and joined them at once.

"*Dieu!* how pretty you both look. Really Annette is improving. She has changed a lot in eight days," he said. He looked at her with an observing eye, then added:

"The lines are softer, more blended, the complexion is more brilliant. She is already much less of a little girl and much more of a *Parisienne*."

"Let us commence to the right," he said, "and we will join the Duchess."

The Countess who was *au courant* on all matters relating to paintings, and as interested as an exhibitor asked:

"What is the general opinion?"

"Splendid *Salon!* A remarkable Bonnat, two excellent works by Carolus Duran; an admirable one by Puvis de Chavannes; a Rool, marvelous and very new; a Gervex, exquisite; and a lot of others, Béraud, Carzin, Duez, in fact a cup full of good things."

"And yours?" she said.

"They have paid me compliments, but I am not pleased with my work."

"You never are."

"Yes! sometimes, but, to-day, really I think I have reason."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Let us go and see it first," she said.

They made their way to his picture — two little country girls bathing in a stream,— and found an admiring group standing before it.

"It is exquisite. A perfect jewel," exclaimed the Countess. "You have never done anything better."

He drew closer to her, gratified for each word of praise, which calmed him, and seemed to heal a wound.

And some rapid reasonings ran through his mind, convincing him that she was right.

As he argued, she understood, and saw correctly with the eye of an intelligent Parisian. He forgot in reassuring himself that for twelve years he had justly reproached her for admiring too much the affected

style of the languid *élégantes,* the sentiments expressed, the false shades of the mode — and not the art — art alone, art free from ideas, tendencies, and worldly prejudices.

"Let us continue," he said, and they moved on. For a long time he took them from room to room, pointing out the best canvases and explaining the subjects. He was happy with them and made happy by them.

Suddenly the Countess asked:

"What time is it?"

"Twelve thirty."

"Oh! come quickly, we must go to luncheon. The Duchess is to meet us at Ledoyen's, where she told me to bring you, if we do not find her in the rooms."

The restaurant standing in the midst of a group of trees and shrubs was crowded. The murmur of confused voices, of calls, the clinking of glasses and plates, came through the window and the large opened doors. The closely packed tables with people sitting eating at them, were arranged in long rows, to the right and to the left of the straight passage, where the *garçons* ran, bewildered, excited, carrying plates filled with meat, vegetables, fish and fruit. Under the circular gallery there was such a multitude of men and women that one might have said it was a living party.

Everyone laughed, talked, drank, ate and became gay from the effects of the wine; they were over-flowing with that joyousness which a bright, sunshiny day lets fall upon Paris. The *garçon* led the Countess, Annette and Bertin into a reserved private dining-room, where the Duchess was waiting for them.

On entering the room the first thing the painter saw was the Marquis de Farandal beside his aunt, eager and smiling, holding out his arms to receive the Countess' and her daughter's wraps. He felt so annoyed at this simple courtesy, that it was with difficulty that he refrained from saying something rude to the youth. The Duchess explained meeting her nephew and the departure of Musadieu, who was called away by the minister of the *Beaux-Arts*. As Bertin thought that this handsome, insipid Marquis would marry Annette, that he had come here to see her, that he looked upon her already as his future wife, he became more unnerved and thoroughly exasperated. It seemed as if someone had stolen his rights — some mysterious and sacred rights.

As soon as they were seated at the table, the Marquis sitting next to Annette, occupied himself with her, with that eager air of a man who has a full authority and right to pay attention. He looked curiously at her, in a way that seemed to the painter too bold and inquisitive. He wore a satisfied and almost tender smile. In his manner and words there appeared already that decisive attitude that one adopts, when one makes the announcement of a near prize of possession.

The Duchess and Countess looked at him with approval, they were delighted that he had voluntarily accepted the rôle of a fiancé, and they glanced at each other with a pleased and meaning look.

As soon as luncheon was over, they all returned to the Exhibition. The place was so crowded now, that it was almost impossible to get inside the rooms; the heat of humanity, and that stale odor of dresses and cloaks that have been worn some time, made the atmosphere

suffocating and heavy. People no longer looked at the pictures, but at the faces and gowns, everyone seemed to be looking about for someone he knew. After five minutes Olivier and Madame de Guilleroy found themselves separated from the rest. He wanted to look for them but she held his arm, saying: "We are alright, leave them alone. It was understood if we lost each other, we should all meet at the buffet at four o'clock."

"That is true," he said. But he felt annoyed at the idea that the marquis was with Annette, he was so affected and absurd with his fatuous gallantry.

The Countess murmured: "You love me always?"

"Why! yes, certainly," he replied with a preoccupied air. And he looked over the multitude of heads to see if he could see M. de Farandal's gray hat.

Seeing that he was absent-minded, and wishing to bring back his thoughts, she said: "Oh! if you knew how I adore your picture this year. It is your masterpiece!"

He smiled, and suddenly forgot the young people, and remembered only his anxiety of the morning.

"Really? You think so?"

"Yes! I prefer it to any you have done."

"I have not been at all contented with it."

With caressing words she wreathed fresh laurels around him, knowing well, since a long time, that nothing is so powerful with an artist as tender and continued flattery. Re-animated and cheered up by her kind words, he commenced to talk with her, only seeing her, hearing only her voice in the great moving chaos of humanity.

"How I would love to kiss you," he whispered as he looked down at her.

A warm blush overspread her cheeks, and looking at him with shining eyes she said: "Then you do love me still."

And he replied with the intonation she wanted and which she had not heard when she asked the question before.

"Yes! I love you, Any dear."

"Come then to see me of an evening," she said, "now that my daughter has returned I do not go out much. If I could keep you with me always, how I would spoil you. Come oftener of an evening. Promise."

"I promise," he said.

A voice close to her ear said: "Mamma."

The Countess started, and turning round, saw Annette, the Duchess, and her nephew joining them.

"It is four o'clock," said the Duchess, "I am very tired and I want to go home."

"I don't care to stay longer, I am quite ready to leave," replied the Countess.

They reached the interior staircase which separates the galleries where the drawings and water colors are hung, and which dominates the immense glass-roofed gardens where the sculpture is exhibited.

As Bertin wished them "Good-bye" at the door, Madame de Guilleroy asked in a low voice:

"You will come this evening, then?"

"Yes."

Then he returned to the Exhibition to talk with the other artists upon their impressions of the day.

The painters and sculptors stood in groups around the statues, before the buffet, here, there and everywhere; they were disputing like they do every year, in sustaining or attacking the same ideas. Olivier Bertin who usually became animated in these disputes — making a specialty of repartee, and of disconcerting attacks, and also having a reputation as an intellectual theorist, of which he was justly proud — tried to get up an interest in the arguments, but it was no use, he was absent-minded and had no wish to listen to what they were saying or to understand it. Although he liked to argue and put forth his theories, he was in no mood for these debates to-day. He had forgotten the annoyance he had felt in the morning concerning his picture, and could think only of the Marquis always near to Annette. What did it matter to him after all? Why did he wish to stop this marriage which would be so advantageous to both? But no reasoning in the world could efface the displeased impression which had seized him when he saw Farandal speak and smile in the way he did, when looking in the young girl's face.

When he called on the Countess in the evening, she was alone with her daughter; they were again knitting under the lamp-light the coverlet for the poor. It was with difficulty that he refrained from saying something rude and sarcastic about the Marquis, he wanted to show up to Annette the conceit and vulgarity that was hidden under his polished manner.

He had got into the habit of not putting himself out to be entertaining when he made these after-dinner calls; he was an old friend and felt like one of the family, he would lie back in the lounge chair, and would dream, or talk, or go half to sleep as he reposed in

this tranquil intimacy. But now, to-night, he felt all the eagerness and energy of a man who wants to please; his talk was brilliant, he whipped up his high spirits, and when he heard the Countess and her child laugh gayly, or when he saw that they were moved, and they put down their work to listen to him, he felt a thrill of satisfaction which paid him for his trouble.

Every evening when he knew them to be alone he came, and never had he passed such happy evenings.

Madame de Guilleroy, always tormented with the fear that he might want to marry, exerted every effort to make him happy and comfortable in her home; seeing that he preferred to call and see them, instead of going to the club or theater, she refused invitations to dinners, balls, and receptions, just to have the happiness of throwing in the telegraph box as she went out of an afternoon the little blue telegram which said: "This Evening."

At first, when he used to look at the clock every minute, she wished to give him as quickly as possible the tête-à-tête that he seemed so much to desire, and so sent Annette to bed at ten o'clock, and then seeing one day that he was surprised, and hearing him say laughingly that Annette ought not to be treated as though she were a naughty little girl, she gave her a quarter of an hour's grace, then half an hour, then an hour.

He did not stay long after the girl had wished them "Good night"; it seemed as if the half of the charm which drew him to this house went with her. As soon as she had gone he would take up his usual attitude at the Countess' feet, sitting on the little low chair quite close to her and from time to time lay his cheek

against her knees, and hold her hand in his, then his high spirits falling suddenly, he would cease to speak, and seemed to repose in a tender silence from the efforts that he had made.

Little by little she began to understand with a woman's instinct, that Annette attracted him almost as much as she did, but she was not hurt, it made her happy to think that he could find between them both, something of the family life of which she felt she had deprived him, and so she imprisoned him more than ever between them both, playing *à la maman,* so that he could feel almost a father to her little girl, and thinking that this new shade of sentiment would add to the pleasure which brought him to her house. Her wish to be attractive in his eyes was ever present, but her anxiety was now great, for she was beginning to feel on all sides, like a prick as yet almost imperceptible, the innumerable advances of age; and so she struggled on with her coquetry, and took more strenuous measures. To become as slim as Annette, she continued not to drink at her meals, and gradually, by careful and incessant efforts she regained the straight, slim figure of her younger days, so much so, that from the back, when they were walking together, it was difficult to tell one from the other. But her face being made thinner resented this *régime,* the skin that had been stretched out, wrinkled and took a yellowish tint, which showed to better advantage her daughter's youthful freshness, so she had to resort to the "*petits soins*" for her face as an actress does. Although these remedies by daylight made her complexion a little suspicious, by lamp light she had that charming and

artificial brilliancy which gives to women who use cosmetic a matchless complexion.

The arresting of this decline and the use of artificial means, modified her habits. She avoided as much as possible the comparisons in full daylight, and sought them by lamp light, as it gave her an advantage. When she felt tired and pale and older than usual, she would have convenient headaches which excused her attending the balls and theaters; and the days when she felt that she was at her best she triumphed and played the rôle of big sister, but always with the grave modesty of a mother. Then so as to wear dresses almost like her daughter's, she would dress Annette in gowns that were a little too serious for her, and Annette, whose character was becoming more brilliant and gay, wore them with a sparkling vivacity which made her prettier than ever. She lent herself with all her heart to making her beautiful mother as young and attractive as she could, and instinctively played with her the little scenes of grace that showed her most to advantage; instinctively she knew *when* to embrace her, *when* to put her arm around her waist with tenderness, and to show by a movement, a caress, by some ingenious invention how pretty they both were, and what little difference there was between them.

Of this resemblance with one so natural, with the other so ardently striven for, there was born in the mind and in the heart of the painter, the singular impression of a double being, old and new, one part so well-known and the other almost ignored; the two bodies, made one after the other with the same flesh,—it was the continuance of the same woman made

younger, and become as she once had been. And he lived near them, shared his heart between the two, feeling for the mother the awakened passion, and for the daughter an obscure tenderness.

PART SECOND

CHAPTER I

July 20th, Paris, 11 o'clock.

Mon Ami:

My mother has just died at Roncières. We are taking the midnight train. Do not come. We have told no one. Pity me, and think of me.

YOUR ANY.

21st, July, Mid-day.

Ma Pauvre Amie:

I should have started in spite of you, if I were not in the habit of considering all your wishes as orders. Since yesterday I have thought of you incessantly, with a keen sorrow. I thought of the silent journey that you made at night with your child and your husband in the half-lit railway carriage that was carrying you to your dead. I saw you all three under the feeble oily lamps, you crying, and Annette sobbing. I saw your arrival at the station, the long drive in the carriage, your entrance to the château, where the servants awaited you, your flight up the staircase, towards the room, towards the bed on which she laid, your first look at her, and your kiss on her thin, peaceful face, and I thought of your heart, the half of which belongs to me, and I know how it is suffering, and how it stifles

you. This thought of your grief pains me so much.

I kiss your poor tearful eyes, my darling, with love and pity.

OLIVIER.

Mon Ami:

If anything could have given me happiness at this sad moment, it was your letter. It did me good. We buried mother yesterday, and since her poor inanimate body went out of this house, it seems that I am alone in the world. One loves one's mother almost without knowing it, without feeling it, because it is as natural as living. And one does not know the depths of the roots of this love, until the moment of the last separation. No other affection can be compared with it, because all others are from accidental meetings; but this is of our birth. The others come to us later by the chances of life, but this lives since our first day, it is in our very blood. And then it is not only a mother that one loses, it is our childhood itself, which has half disappeared, for our little lives of babyhood belonged as much to her as to ourselves. She is the only one who knows it as we do, she knows all the little insignificant and dear things, which were the first sweet emotions of our young hearts. Only to my mother could I say "Do you remember that, mother, the day when? . . . Do you remember, mother, my pretty china doll that grand-mamma gave me?" We talked together, and made long and dear chaplets of small memories which no one on the earth knows now but I. So you see, mon ami, it is a part of myself that is dead, the oldest part and the best. I have lost the poor heart where the little girl that I was still lived.

Now no one knows her, no one can remember the little Anne, her baby dresses, her laughs, her ways. And a day will come, perhaps it is not so far off, when it will be my turn to go, leaving alone my little Annette, like mother has left me. How sad it is, how hard and cruel; when we are well and happy we never think of Death, we do not look around and see it taking someone at every instant, as it will take us soon. If we saw Death, and thought of it, if one were not careless and gay, and blinded by all the frivolity that passes before us, we could not live, for the sight of this massacre without end would drive us mad.

I am so crushed and hopeless, that I have no strength left. Day and night I think of mother, nailed in that box, beneath the damp earth, out there alone in the field, under the rain, and her sweet old face, which I used to kiss with so much love, nothing but a frightful putrefaction. How terrible it is, mon ami! how terrible! When I lost my father I was only just married and I did not feel the things as I feel them to-day. Yes! pity me, think of me, and write to me. I need you so much at this moment.

ANNE.

Ma Pauvre Amie:

Your grief hurts me terribly, and I no longer see life *en rose*. Since you left I feel lost. I am without inclinations, without refuge. Everything tires, annoys, and irritates me. I am thinking always of you and Annette, and you are both so far away when I need you near me so much, ah! so much. It is extraordinary how far away you seem to me, and how I miss you.

Never, even in the days when I was young, were you *all* to me as you are at this moment. For a long time I have felt this *crise* which must be the sunstroke of Indian Summer. That what I am feeling is so strange that I must tell you. Just imagine, since you went, I feel that I cannot go out. Before, and even during the last months, you know I liked to go out on the boulevards. I was amused by the people and the things I saw, I tasted of the joy of seeing and the pleasure of walking, I went about, not caring where, just to walk, breathe and dream. I can no longer do it. As soon as I go in the streets an agony oppresses me, like the fear of a blind man who has lost the dog that guides him. I become worried like a traveler who has lost the trace of the footpath in a dense wood, and I have to return to my home. Paris seems to me empty, odious, bewildering; I cannot go for walks now, so I go to my club. And do you know why I am able to go there? because you are not part of it in any way. When I knew you were in Paris, I was almost sure to meet you somewhere, it was possible to see you at the first turn of the avenue. I could go anywhere, because you might be anywhere, and if I did not meet you, I might at least meet Annette, who is an emanation of you — one or the other — there was always the hope of seeing, it might be that you were coming towards me from afar, or it might be that I was following you and would soon overtake you. Now there is no one. Paris is empty for me.

You will think I am very selfish, my poor darling, to speak thus of the solitude of an old, maudlin bachelor, when you are crying such sorrowful tears. Pardon me,

mon amie, I am so used to being spoilt by you that I cry: Help! Help! when you are no longer with me. All my love.

OLIVIER.

Mon Ami:

Thank you for your letter. I have so much need to know that you love me. I am passing through some terrible days, it seemed that the grief would kill me in my turn. It was like a block of agony closed in my bosom which got larger and larger, almost strangling and suffocating me. The doctor whom they called in to cure the nervous attacks which I had, four or five times a day, injected morphine; it nearly drove me mad, and the great heat which we are having aggravated my condition, throwing me into a state of excessive excitement bordering on delirium; but I have felt calmer since the terrible storm on Friday. I must tell you that since the day of the burial, I had not cried at all, I could not, and then during the storm whose approach agitated me terribly, I suddenly felt the tears beginning to fall from my eyes — slow, small, burning tears. Oh! these first tears! how they hurt! they tore my heart as though they were claws, and they tightened my throat so that I could not breathe. Then they came quicker, larger, and cooler; they fell from my eyes like a stream, and there came so many — so many that my handkerchief was soaked, and I had to take another; then that great block of grief seemed to get smaller, to melt, to flow from my eyes. From that time I cried from morning till night, and it has saved me. One ends by going mad, or one dies if one cannot cry. I am lonely also, my husband is making

his rounds in the country, and I asked him to take Annette with him; it diverts and consoles her a little, poor child. They go in the carriage or on horseback eight or ten *lieues* from Roncières, and in spite of her sadness she comes back to me with rosy cheeks, and her eyes sparkling with life, all animated from the country air and the gallop she has had. How beautiful it is to be that age. I think we shall stay here for another fifteen days or three weeks, and then, although it will be the month of August, we shall return to Paris for the reason that you know so well. I send you all my heart that remains.

ANY.

August 4th, Paris.

I can bear it no longer, Any. You must come back or something will happen. I ask myself if I am not sick, for I am so disgusted with my work and everything else. First of all it is very warm in Paris, so much so that every night is a bath of eight or nine hours. When I get up I feel depressed by the fatigue of this sleep in a sweating-room, and then I walk up and down for an hour or two before a white canvas, wanting to design something on it; but I have nothing in my mind, my eye, or my hand. I am no longer a painter, this useless effort towards work is exasperating, I have had models come, have placed them, but as they give me poses, movements and expressions that I have painted to satiety, I have made them dress themselves again and told them to be off.

Really there is nothing that I can see new, and I suffer as though I were going blind. What is it? Fatigue of the eye, or the brain? the draining of the

artist's faculties? or a break down of the optic nerves? Does one know? it seems to me that I have finished unveiling the unexplored corner that was given me to unveil. I do not see more now than what everybody sees. I make what all the poor artists have made. I have only the vision and the observation of the ordinary painter. Formerly, not so very long ago, the number of new subjects appeared to me unlimited, and I had such a variety of ways to express them that the *embarras du choix* made me hesitate. Then, all of a sudden, this glimpse of a world of subjects is gone, my investigations have become useless and sterile. The people I see have no sense for me, and I no longer find in human beings the character and the soul that I liked so much to discern and render apparent; however, I think that I might be able to make a very good portrait of your daughter. Is it because she resembles you so much, that I confuse you both in my thoughts? Perhaps.

Then after forcing myself to draw a man and a woman who are original types, I decide to go out and have luncheon somewhere, for I have no longer the courage to sit alone in my dining-room.

The Boulevard Malesherbes looks like an avenue of a forest imprisoned in a deserted town. All the houses are empty, the *arroseurs* flood the pavements with water, splashing everywhere on the wooden walks which exhale a vapor of wet tar; and from one end to the other of the long incline from the Parc Monceau to Saint-Augustin, you see perhaps five or six black forms, people of no importance — tradespeople and servants.

The black shadows spread out on the burning sidewalks at the foot of the trees and make odd spots that

look like dried liquid; the stillness of the leaves on the branches and their gray shadows on the asphalt express the state of this burning town, the whole city is sleeping and perspiring in the manner of a workman, who, tired out, falls asleep on a bench and sweats in the blazing sun. I think of the lovely fresh mornings in your orchards, full of little wild flowers, which give the air the taste of honey. Then I go, already disgusted, into a restaurant where I see bald-headed, fat men eating; their waistcoats unbuttoned and foreheads damp with perspiration, they sit there eating their luncheon in a dejected manner. All the food is warm, the melon melted upon the ice, damp bread, flabby fillet of beef, re-cooked vegetables, purulent cheese; overripe fruit — and I come away feeling a nausea, and I return to my home to try and sleep a little until the hour for dinner, which I take at the club. There I always find Adelmans, Maldant and Rocdiane, Landa and others who bore me to death. After having yawned as many times as there are minutes between eight o'clock and midnight, I go home to bed and undress thinking that it is all going to recommence tomorrow.

Yes! *ma chère amie,* I am at the age when a bachelor's life becomes intolerable, because there is nothing left under the sun that is new for me. A bachelor should be young, eager and gay; when one is no longer that, it is dangerous for him to have his liberty. *Dieu!* how I once loved my liberty, that was before I loved you better. How it weighs on me to-day. *La liberté* for an old bachelor like I am is an empty space, empty everywhere; it is the road of the dead without anything in it preventing us from seeing the end. The question

I ask myself always is: What shall I do? Whom shall I go to see so as not to be alone? and I go from comrade to comrade, from hand-shake to hand-shake, begging a little friendship. I gather up the crumbs which do not make a slice. Ah! *You!* I have you my dear friend, but you do not belong to me. It is perhaps from you that this anguish comes, for it is the desire for your touch, your presence, to have the same roof over our heads, the same walls surrounding us, the same interests holding our hearts, the need of this communion of hopes, griefs, pleasures, gayety, sadness, and also of material things, which causes me so much anxiety. You *are* mine, that is to say, I can steal a little of you from time to time, but I would like to always breathe the same air that you are breathing, share everything with you, only use things that belong to us both, feel that all that I have is yours as much as mine, the glass from which I drink, the divan on which I rest, the bread that I eat, and the fire that warms me.

Adieu, return to me quickly, I am too unhappy away from you.

OLIVIER.

Mon Ami:

I am sick and so weary that you would not recognize me. I think I have cried too much, I must stay here a little longer, and rest before coming back to you, because I would not like you to see me as I am. My husband starts for Paris the day after to-morrow, and will give you all the news. He wants you to dine with him somewhere, and tells me to ask you to wait for him at your home at seven o'clock.

As for myself, as soon as I feel a little better, as soon as my face alters — it looks as though I had risen from the dead and makes me afraid of myself — I shall return to you. I also have only you and Annette now in all the world, and I want to offer to each of you all that I can give without robbing the other.

I would like to have you kiss my eyes which have cried so much.

ANNE.

When Olivier Bertin received this letter saying that their return was put off again, he had an immoderate wish to take a carriage and start off at once to the station and take the train to Roncières, then remembering that M. de Guilleroy would be back the next day, he became more resigned, and began to desire the arrival of the husband with almost as much impatience as if it were the wife herself. Never had he liked Guilleroy more than during these twenty-four hours of waiting.

When he came in he rushed up to him with outstretched hands crying:

"Ah! *mon cher!* How pleased I am to see you." The other one seemed also very satisfied, but contented above all to return to Paris, for the life in Normandy for three weeks had not been very gay for him.

The two men sat down on a little *tête-à-tête* sofa in a corner of the studio under a canopy of oriental silks, and once more they clasped each other's hands and seemed quite moved at meeting each other again.

"And the Countess," asked the artist, "how is she?"

"Oh! not very well," replied Guilleroy. "Her

mother's death affected her greatly, and she is getting better very slowly indeed. In fact, I am a little anxious about her."

"Why doesn't she come back?"

"I don't know. I tried to persuade her but it was no use."

"What does she do every day?"

"*Mon Dieu!* She cries, she is thinking always of her mother, it is not good for her. I want her very much to have a change of air, to quit the place where all this has passed, you can understand that."

"And Annette?"

"Oh! she — a lovely rose."

Olivier smiled joyfully and he asked: "Did she suffer much grief?"

"Yes! indeed, the poor child was dreadfully unhappy, but you know the grief of eighteen years soon passes."

After a short silence Guilleroy said: "*Eh! bien!* My dear fellow where are we going to dine to-night? I want to see something lively, I want to hear some noise and see some movement, I have stagnated down there, and want brightening up a bit."

"Well then, what do you say to the *Café des Ambassadeurs,* at this season I don't think we can do better than go there."

"Right you are! Anywhere for me if there's some life." And they started off arm in arm towards the Champs-Elysées, Guilleroy exhilarated with the keen joy of a Parisian who returns to his own city.

The evening was oppressive. The heavy sky seemed to weigh over the town, and on the wide Avenue des Champs-Elysées where one could hear the lively

strains of the orchestra as it opened the nightly concert.

The two men seated on the balcony of the *Café des Ambassadeurs* could see below the empty benches and chairs of the railed-off enclosure, right up to the little theater where the singers in the palish light of the electric globes and daylight blended, were displaying their gaudy bespangled toilets and the pink tints of their flesh. The odors of fried eatables, of sauces, and warm food floated on the imperceptible breeze, mingling with the perfume of the chestnut blossoms as it was wafted over the avenue, and when a woman passed looking for the seat that had been reserved for her, followed by a man in evening dress, leaving in her wake the intoxicating and strong scent of her gown and her body, Guilleroy became radiant and murmured:

"Ah! Ah! *mon vieux,* I prefer to be here than at Roncières."

"And I," replied Bertin, "prefer to be there than here."

"*Allons donc!*"

"Yes! really I would. Paris seems disgusting this summer."

"Never mind, it is always Paris, and there's no place like it."

The deputy seemed to be living in a day of contentment, one of those rare days of effervescent sprightliness when a serious-minded man is likely to do very foolish things.

He looked at two *cocottes,* elaborately dressed and be-jeweled who were dining at the next table with three thin young men, superlatively correct, and he questioned Olivier slyly on all the well-known and question-

able girls, whom he daily heard spoken about. Then he murmured in a tone of deep regret:

"You are a lucky dog to have remained a bachelor; you can do and see so many things."

But the artist vehemently protested, and like all those who have thoughts to torment them, he took Guilleroy into his confidence and told him of his troubles and his lonely solitude. When he had told him all, enumerating right to the end of the litany of his melancholies, and told him artlessly, as a man impelled by the need of relieving his heart, how much he had longed for love in his home, and the rustling of a woman's garments always at his side, the Count, in his turn, admitted that there was something really good in marriage, after all. Then refinding his parliamentary eloquence, he spoke of the joys of his own domestic life, he spoke in the highest praise of the Countess, her thoughtfulness and kindness for every one under his roof, from himself to the lowest menial, her love and devotion to their daughter, he spoke of her charm and beauty and how everyone loved her, and Olivier showed his approval by gravely nodding his head at frequent intervals.

Happy to hear her thus spoken of, but jealous of this intimate joy that Guilleroy extolled as his right and duty the painter finished by saying with sincere conviction:

"*You!* if anyone has been lucky you have, you are the most fortunate man I know."

The deputy pleased and flattered admitted that he certainly was a most fortunate being after all, and said:

"I should like to see her back. Really I am feeling very anxious about her. Look here, old man, you say you are bored in Paris, why don't you run down to

Roncieres and bring her back? She will listen to you because you are her best friend, while a husband. . . . Well, you know. . . . "

Olivier was delighted.

"I want nothing better than that," he said, "and yet . . . don't you think it might annoy her to have me arrive like that?"

"Not at all! Not the least bit. No! No! You go, *mon cher!*"

"I consent then. I shall start to-morrow by the one o'clock train. Shall I send her a telegram?"

"No! I'll see about that. I will let her know, so that she will be able to send a carriage to meet you at the station."

And as they had finished their dinner they walked off up the boulevards, but at the end of half an hour the Count quite suddenly left the painter, under the pretext of some very urgent business that he had forgotten to arrange.

CHAPTER II

THE Countess and her daughter were just sitting down to luncheon in the large dining-room at Roncières. Both were dressed in deepest mourning.

Ancestral portraits, ingenuously painted, hung upon the walls,— one long-lost ancestor in a cuirass, another in a close-fitting coat, buttoned to the throat, this one as powdered officer of the French Guards, that one as a Colonel of the Restoration, making a direct line of dead and gone Guilleroys. The frames were so old that the gold crumbled and dropped off.

"Open the windows," said the Countess to the two velvet-footed servants who were waiting upon them. "It is quite chilly in this room."

The three windows, almost as wide as bays, and reaching from the floor to the ceiling, were thrown open as double doors, letting in a rush of warm air, the fresh, sweet smell of new-mown hay, mingled with the humidity of the great, sombre dining-room enclosed in the thick walls of the old Château.

"Ah! that is delightful," said Annette drawing in a deep breath.

The two women looked out at the bright, blue summer sky, slightly veiled with the mid-day haze, which reflects on the earth when impregnated by the sun; from the opened windows they could see the long, green sweep of the park, dotted here and there with groups of trees, and the great expanse of yellow open country, which lay beyond, dazzling in the sunlight, illumined as far as the horizon by the cloth of gold of the ripe harvest.

"We will take a long walk after luncheon," said the Countess, "we might walk as far as Berville, following the pathway by the river, as it is much too warm to go across the fields."

"Yes, mamma," said Annette joyfully, "and we'll take Julio to hunt up the partridges."

"You know your father forbids that," replied her mother.

"Oh! Yes! but he is in Paris now, and you know mother, how amusing it is to watch Julio's ears stand up. *Tiens!* there he is annoying the cows now. *Dieu!* isn't he funny when he jumps about like that?"

Pushing back her chair she got up and ran to the window crying out:

"Julio! Julio! good dog, Julio."

On the lawn three big cows, satiated with grass, and depressed with the heat, were resting on their flanks, with stomachs projecting, pushed forward by their weighty pressure on the soil. Going from one to the other, with loud barks and mad gambols, with furious but feigned anger, was Julio — a slender, white and russet chasing spaniel, whose crinkled ears pricked up every moment; he had set his heart upon making the three great animals get up, because they were tired and wanted to rest; this was his favorite game whenever he saw them resting comfortably. The cows were annoyed, but not frightened, they looked at him with their big moist eyes and slowly turned their heads to follow every movement.

Annette again called out from the window:

"Good Julio. Brave dog."

And the spaniel became more excited and bolder; he barked louder and ventured up to their buttocks and pretended to bite them. They were beginning to get uneasy and the nervous quivers of their flesh to drive off the flies, became more frequent and longer. Suddenly the dog carried off by a run, that he could not stop in time, arrived at full spring so near to one of the cows, that, so as not to turn a summersault and land at her feet, he had to jump over her. In his leap, his hind legs touched her lightly, the great beast started with fear and raising her head she got up slowly on her four feet. The other two seeing her stand up rose at once, and Julio barked joyfully, and danced around

them his dance of triumph, while Annette warmly congratulated him, calling out:

"Bravo, Julio. That was well done. Bravo. Good dog."

"Annette! Annette! my child," said the Countess, "Come back to your luncheon at once."

But Annette was shading her eyes with her hands and looking out at the fields, way beyond the park.

"*Dieu!*" she exclaimed. "Right over there is a telegraph messenger, he is coming towards the Château."

In the invisible footpath that was lost in the midst of the wheat and oats, a blue blouse seemed to glide in and out, at the top of the ears of corn, coming in the direction of the park gates.

"Oh! *Mon Dieu!*" said the Countess, "I hope it is not bad news."

She still trembled with that terror which remains with us so long, when the first knowledge we have had of the death of a loved one, has come to us through a telegram. Even now she could not tear off the gummed band to open the little blue paper, without her fingers trembling, and her heart beating quickly, and thinking that the paper which took her so long to undo was bringing her another grief which would again make her tears flow.

Annette, on the contrary, was full of curiosity, she was young, and loved the unknown which comes to us. Her heart, which for the first time in her young life had been bruised, could only feel eager curiosity to know what news was in the formidable black bag slung on the hips of the postman, the black bag whose

contents scattered so much joy and misery through the streets of the towns, and the roads of the villages.

The Countess left her luncheon, she could not eat, her mind was following this man who was coming towards her, the bearer of a few written words — words that perhaps would wound her like a knife-cut at the throat. The agony of suspense made her breath come in gasps; what could this news be that was so urgent. Was it Olivier? Was he ill? Perhaps he was dead, now lying cold and stiff and she would never see his loved face again.

The ten minutes that she waited for the messenger seemed interminable: then, when she had torn open the telegram and seen her husband's name, she read:

"Our friend Bertin starts for Roncières on the ten o'clock train. Send phaeton to station. Love."

"Well, mamma?" questioned Annette.

"Mr. Olivier Bertin is coming down to see us," she replied.

"Ah! *Quelle chance!* When is he coming?"

"To-day. Very soon."

"At four o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Oh! isn't he nice?"

But the Countess had turned pale, for a new fear had for some time been growing in her heart, and this abrupt arrival of the artist seemed to her as painful a menace, as any that she could have foreseen.

"You must go and meet him with the carriage," she said to her daughter.

"And you will come too, mamma, will you not?"

"No! I will wait for you here."

"Oh! but why? He will be so sorry."

"I do not feel very well to-day, dear."

"But you said a little while ago, mother, that you wanted to walk as far as Berville."

"Yes! but I don't feel well, evidently the luncheon has not agreed with me."

"By four o'clock you will be better," persisted Annette.

"No! I am even going up to my room now. Let me know as soon as you come back."

"Yes, mamma."

Then after giving orders that the phaeton should be round at the door at the time desired, and that the guest's apartment should be in all readiness, the Countess went up to her room and locked herself in.

Her life up till now had glided away almost without suffering, the smooth course roughened only now and again by Olivier's affection, and her great anxiety and effort to keep it. She had always come out victorious in the struggle. Her heart, rocked by success and praises, became the exacting heart of a beautiful worldly woman, to whom all the comforts of this life are due. After having made a brilliant marriage where her inclinations were not considered, after accepting love as the complement to a happy existence, after having taken her part in a guilty *liaison,* drawn into it greatly by temptation, a little by religion for the sentiment itself, partly as a compensation for the vulgar monotony of her life,— she was fortified and barricaded in this happiness that chance had brought her way, so much so that her one desire was to defend and hold it against all. She had accepted with the friendly favor of a beautiful society woman, the agreeable events which came into

her life; she had not that adventurous spirit that seems to belong to the worldly woman, she did not strive for new pleasure, and long for the unknown, but she was tender and clinging, thoughtful and contented with her present happiness, and although, by nature, she was anxious for the future, she knew how to enjoy the elements which destiny furnished her with a saving and shrewd discretion.

Then, little by little, without her even admitting it, there had crept into her soul the obscure preoccupation of the days that had passed, and age that was coming upon her; in her thoughts it took the form of a longing that never ceased. But she well knew that this decline of life was without end, and that once commenced it could not be stopped, and yielding to the instinct of danger she closed her eyes as she glided down life's pathway so as to keep her dream and not see the vertigo of the abyss which lay before her, and the hopelessness of her frailty.

So she lived on, smiling, with a sort of artificial pride that she had remained beautiful so long, and when Annette appeared at her side with the freshness of eighteen years, instead of suffering from this nearness, she was modestly proud on the contrary that the skilled grace of her maturity was preferred to the radiant bloom of her daughter's first youth.

She was thinking that now that Annette had come she would have a happy and tranquil period, when the death of her mother came and dashed all her hopes. There was no place in her heart for anything but the thought of her old mother; from morning till night she was sunk in grief, trying to recall a thousand little things of her dead,— some familiar words, her face as it used to be,

the dresses she had once worn; then, when she had thus arrived at a paroxysm of hopelessness, she was seized every few minutes with nervous attacks and fainting fits; after a time all this accumulated grief burst out in tears and flowed from her eyes night and day. Then one day when her maid came into the room to draw back the curtains and open the shutters, she said to her mistress:

"Comment va Madame aujourd' hui?"

"Oh! not at all well," replied the Countess, "I am feeling quite worn out and exhausted. I must give up."

The girl held the breakfast tray in her hand, and as she looked at the Countess she exclaimed in voice of sincere pity:

"En effet, Madame a très mauvaise mine. Madame ferait bien de se soigner."

The tone in which it was said seemed as though she had driven the point of a needle into the Countess' heart; as soon as the girl had closed the door behind her she got up and examined her face in the long glass.

She remained stupefied looking at her reflection, dismayed at the sight of her hollow cheeks and red eyes, at the ravages that these few days of suffering had made. She had studied her face so much that she knew all the expressions, all the good points, all her smiles; for had she not many times conquered the pallor, repaired the little fatigues; destroyed the light wrinkles which showed in the full daylight at the corner of the eyes, and now it suddenly seemed to her that she was looking at the face of another woman, which was decomposing and irreparably sick. To see better and to be able to verify more clearly this unexpected change, she

went close to the face that looked at her from the mirror, she touched the glass with her forehead, and her hard breathing spread out a dampness on its surface, which obscured and almost effaced the wan image that she was gazing at. She took her handkerchief and wiped off the haze her breath had made, and trembling with a strange emotion, she made a long and patient examination of the alterations of her face.

With a light finger she stretched out the skin on her cheeks, and lifting up her wavy hair, smoothed out the forehead; she was dismayed at the yellow tints of the flesh above the cheek and on the temple; she then turned back her eyelids to see the white of the eye, and after examined her teeth which were slightly discolored near where the gold filling shone.

She gave so much attention to this review of her failing beauty that she did not hear the door open, and she started when her maid's voice behind her said:

"*Madame a oublié de prendre son thé.*"

The Countess turned round embarrassed and ashamed, and the servant, guessing her thoughts, said:

"It is because Madame has cried too much, there is nothing worse than tears for spoiling the skin. It is the blood turned into water."

"It is also age," said the Countess sadly.

"Oh! no, it is not age with Madame," said her maid. "With a few days' rest, Madame will be beautiful again, but Madame must go out more in the fresh air, and above all not cry."

As soon as she was dressed, the Countess went out in the park and for the first time since her mother's death, she went to visit the little orchard where she used

to gather nosegays of flowers, then she reached the river, and walked along by the water until luncheon time.

When sitting at the table by her daughter's side, opposite to her husband, she said, so as to know what they thought:

"I feel so much better. I ought not to be so pale to-day."

"Oh! you don't look at all well. You look very sick indeed," the Count replied.

Her heart strings tightened and again she had the wish to cry; tears were quite a habit with her now.

All the evening and the next day and the days following, whether she was thinking of her mother or of herself, at every moment she felt a lump in her throat, and the tears spring to her eyes, but knowing now how fatal they were to her fading beauty, she kept them back and by a superhuman effort of will she brought herself to take an interest in other things, she mastered herself and controlled her emotions, she tried to banish all sad thoughts from her mind, so as to nurse herself back to health.

Above all things she did not wish to return to Paris and see Olivier Bertin, she felt she could not meet him until she had quite recovered; she was now too thin, and at last she realized the truth, that the flesh of a woman of her age needs to be full and firm so as to preserve its freshness. She went out daily in the fields and lanes to get back her appetite, and although she came back weary and worn, she would sit down to her luncheon and force herself to eat.

The Count wanted to return to Paris, and could not understand why she was so obstinate in refusing to leave

Roncières; at last before her invincible resistance, he declared that if she would not return he would go alone, and leave her at liberty to follow when she felt disposed.

Two days after his departure, she received the telegram saying that Olivier would arrive that day.

She wanted to take flight, she so dreaded to meet his first look. She would rather have waited still another two or three weeks; in looking after herself carefully for a few weeks, she could make great changes in her face: there are women who even when they are well and young, under the least influence, are scarcely recognizable from one day to another. But the thought of appearing in full daylight,— in the clear light of the month of August before Olivier, in the glory of the summer sun beside Annette so fresh and fair, so like what she had once been,— worried her so much that she decided at once not to go to the station to meet him, but to wait in the half-light of the drawing-room.

She went up to her bedroom to think. From time to time little light breezes moved the lace curtains. The birds chirping filled the air with bird music. Never before had she felt so sad. It was no longer the great crushing grief which had bruised her heart, which had torn her and bowed her down before the soulless body of her dearly loved old mother. This new grief was a thing apart, it had carried her off and she was being drowned in a deep melancholy wave, she had gone into it gently at first, but now she found she could not come out again. Her great wish seemed to be to cry, it was an irresistible want, but she would not give way. Each time that she felt her eyelids wet, she wiped them quickly, got up and walked about,

looked out over the park at the great trees in the forest, and the black-birds in their dark, slow flight, soaring in the clear blue sky above. Then she paused before her mirror, and judged her looks at a glance; she effaced the trace of a tear, touching the corner of the eye with a powder puff, and then she looked at the clock, wondering how far up the road he had already come.

Like all women who carry distress of the soul, whether it is imaginary or real, she clung to him with a desperate, passionate tenderness. Was he not everything to her, *all, all,* more than her life, all that a man can become to a woman, when she loves him only, and knows that she is growing old!

Suddenly she heard on the drive below the cracking of a whip; she ran to the window and saw the phaeton coming round the lawn with the horses galloping. Seated at Annette's side, leaning back in the depths of the carriage, was Olivier; he waved his handkerchief when he saw the Countess, and she replied to his sign by waving her hand. Then she went down the stairs, with heart beating, but happy for the moment, her fears had vanished, she was all excitement with the joy of knowing that he was so near, she was going to see him, and speak to him.

They met in the hall outside the drawing-room door. He opened his arms to her in an outburst of love and in a voice ringing with true emotion he said:

"Ah! Any, Any! My poor Any, my sweetheart."

She closed her eyes and leaned towards him, she nestled up against him holding up her cheek, and as he pressed his lips to it she said simply: "I love you."

Then Olivier, still holding her hands, looked down at her.

"But what a sad, white face, Any," he said.

For a moment she turned faint, then he said:

"You look just a little wan, but that is nothing, it will pass."

She could only murmur in gratitude:

"*Mon ami, mon cher ami,*" she could find nothing more to say.

But he had turned round and was looking for Annette, who had disappeared as he came in the house.

"Isn't it strange, though, to see your daughter in deep mourning?"

"Why strange?" asked the Countess.

"You ask why?" he said with animation. "Why it is your portrait, your portrait that I painted, my own picture. It is you just as I saw you the first day leaving the Duchess' house. You remember the afternoon you came out of the doorway. *Sacristi!* when I saw the *petite* at the station just now, standing there on the platform all in black with the sun lighting up her blonde hair, I was startled; she was blonde and black, the living image of you the day I met you. I almost cried out, I was so bewildered, it startled me. When one has known you as I have, I have known you more than anyone, and loved you more than anyone, and have reproduced you in painting. *Ah! par exemple!* I believe you sent her alone to meet me at the station so as to startle me. *Dieu!* how strange it is. I tell you, Any, I am still bewildered."

"Annette! Nané!" he called out.

The young girl was outside feeding the horses with lumps of sugar.

"*Voilà! Voilà!*" she cried.

She ran to them.

"*Dieu!*" said the painter, "Stand there beside your mother quite close, here, near the light." He compared them, but he repeated mechanically without conviction:

"Yes! it is astonishing — astonishing." For now they resembled each other less when side by side than before they left Paris. The young girl in her straight black garments had a new expression of luminous youth, while since a long time the mother had lost that golden blonde hair, and the peach-like skin that had dazzled and captivated him when he saw her for the first time.

Annette ran upstairs, and Madame de Guilleroy and the artist went in the drawing-room together. He was radiant.

"Ah! what a good idea it was of mine to come," he said, "or rather, what a good idea it was of your husband's, for it was he who thought of it. He commissioned me to bring you back, but do you know what I propose? No? Well, I suggest, on the contrary, that you stay here. It is so cool, and Paris is odious, and now the country is at its very best. *Dieu!* isn't it glorious?"

The evening was falling, and the park was impregnated with a dewy freshness, and the earth emitted imperceptible vapors which threw on the horizon a light, transparent haze. The leaves on the trees shook gently. On the green sward, the three cows were standing with lowered heads and browsing greedily, and four peacocks with important flutterings of their gaudy plumage got up, and perched themselves in a cedar-tree, where they slept at night, under the windows of the Château. Afar off came the sound of dogs barking,

and in the quiet peace of even-tide, there were heard occasional calls of human voices,— the peasants shouting to their comrades across the harvest fields, and the short guttural cry of the drivers as they spurred on the oxen.

The painter stood bare-headed with shining eyes, inhaling deep breaths of air, and as the Countess looked at him, he said softly:

"Ah! This is happiness."

She went up to him and laid her hands on his shoulder.

"This cannot last," she said.

"No! but we will take it now it comes."

"Until now you did not like the country," she said smiling up at him.

"I like it to-day because I find you here, I cannot now live anywhere where you are not, Any. When one is young one can be in love afar off, by letters, by thoughts, by pure exaltations; perhaps because one feels that life is before one; perhaps also when one is young, one has more passion than heart longings; but, at my age, love has become the habit of the infirm, it is a dressing of the soul which now has only one wing and flies less in the Ideal. The heart no longer has esctasies, only selfish exigencies. And then I feel only too well that I have no time to lose if I want to enjoy the rest."

"Oh! poor old man," she said smiling into his eyes as she took his hand in hers.

"Yes! Any, I mean it," he replied. "I am old. Everything shows it,— my hair, my character which has changed, this sadness which often comes upon me now. That is something I have not known until recently — sadness. If someone had told me when I

was thirty years old, that one day I should become sad without a cause, anxious, discontented with everything, I should not have believed it. That proves that my heart also has got old."

"Oh! my heart is quite young," she said with profound certitude. "It has not changed at all. Yes! I think perhaps it has become younger."

They stayed a long time talking thus by the open window, standing close to one another, her hand clasped in his, nearer in this hour of tender communion, in this hour of evening twilight than they had been for a long time. A knock at the door, and the servant entered saying:

"*Madame la comtesse est servie.*"

"Does Mademoiselle Annette know?" asked the Countess.

"*Oui, Madame. Mademoiselle est dans la salle à manger.*"

The three sat down to table. The shutters were closed and the light from two large candelabra of six candles fell across the young girl's face, making her hair look like powdered gold. Bertin smiled and looked at her in admiration. "*Dieu!* isn't she pretty in black!" he said. And he turned towards the Countess after admiring her daughter, as though to thank the mother for having given him this pleasure. When they returned to the drawing-room the moon was up, and shone clearly above the great trees in the park. The dark mass of foliage looked like an island and the country beyond seemed like the gray sea hidden behind the dewy mists which hung over the wide plains.

"Oh! mamma! let us take a stroll, it is so beautiful this evening," cried Annette.

"Very well."

"May I take Julio?"

"Yes, if you like."

They went out. The young girl walked ahead playing with the dog. When they crossed the lawn they heard the snorting of the cows, who were awake, and felt their enemy was near, and they looked up and watched him as he passed. Under the trees farther on, the moon glimmered between the branches, throwing down a shower of fine rays, which glided just to the earth, steeping the leaves and shedding on the road little pools of pure silvery light. Annette and Julio ran on seeming to have in this serene night the same joyous and empty heart. In the glades where the lunar wave fell across the earth, the young girl passed like an apparition, and the painter called her back to them, he was feeling a vague trouble at this black vision with the shiny blonde hair and the fair face. Then when she returned to them, and went off again, he took her mother's hand in his and held it tightly, and as they passed through the deepest shadows, he pressed it to his lips as if each time the sight of Annette revived the longings of his heart. At last they reached the open country; on the great expanse of plains, a few farms and groups of trees were scattered. Across the grayish mist that had crept over the fields was the boundless horizon, and the light silence, the living silence of this beautiful luminous space, was full of unutterable hopes, of undefinable expectations, of the longings which make the summer nights so sweet. High above in the heavens some little thin clouds, stretched out a long line, looking like strings of silver shells. When stopping for a moment, one could listen and hear in

this nocturnal peace, a confused and continued murmur of life — a thousand faint sounds whose harmony at first resembled silence.

A quail in the neighboring meadow sent forth his double cry, and Julio with ears pricked up, went off with cautious steps in the direction whence the two soft flute-like notes had come. Annette followed with a step as light and furtive as the dog's, holding her breath and stooping low as she crept along.

"Ah!" said the Countess, as the painter and she were left alone. "Why do moments like this pass so quickly, one can hold nothing, one can keep nothing. We have not even enough time to taste that which is so good. It is already finished." Olivier drew her hand to his lips, and said smiling:

"This evening I am not philosophical. I am all for the present moment."

"You do not love me as much as I love you," she murmured.

"*Mais! par exemple!* . . . " he began.

She interrupted him, saying:

"No! you love me in the way you spoke of before dinner — as a woman who satisfies the wants of your heart, a woman who has never given you any pain, and who has brought some happiness into your life. I know it and feel it. Yes! I have the consciousness, the fervent joy of having been good, useful, and a help to you. You loved, and you still love, all that you find agreeable in me — my care for you, my admiration, my desire to please you, my passion, the complete gift that I have made to you of my intimate being. But it is not me that you love, do you understand, Olivier? Alas! I know it, and feel it, as one feels a cold air that

blows over one. There are many things that you like in me, my beauty, which is now fading, my devotion, the intellect which one accords me, the opinions which our social friends have of me, and the opinion which you know I have of you, but it is not myself, just me, nothing but myself, do you understand?"

"No, I do not understand very clearly," he said with an amiable little laugh. "Why this unexpected scene of reproaches?"

"Oh! My God," she cried. "If you could only know how much I do love you. I try to make you understand, but I cannot find a way. When I think of you, and that is always, I feel in the innermost depths of my being — of my soul, an unspeakable joy that I belong to you, and an irresistible wish that I could give you more of myself. I want to sacrifice myself in the most absolute manner, for there is nothing better when a woman really loves than for her to give forever, *all, all,* her life, her thought, her body, all that she has, and to feel that she has given, and to be ready to risk all, so as to be able to give still more. I love you, and my love is so strong, that I can even love to suffer for you, I can love to bear my anxieties, torments, jealousies, the pain I have when I feel that you are not tender towards me. There is something I love in you, *someone* in you that I alone have discovered, *someone* that is not known to our world, but a someone that is mine, that can never change, he can never grow old, and I can never stop loving him, for my eyes can see nothing but him — always him.

"I cannot say these things," she said, "There are no words that can express them."

"Dear Any, ah! ma chère amie," he repeated several times in a low stifled voice.

And then Julio bounded up to them, without having found the quail which had stopped chirruping at his approach, and Annette came running up quickly.

"I can't do anything more," she said panting for breath. "I am simply fagged out,— the rest of the way I shall cling to you, monsieur le peintre."

She leaned on Olivier's other arm and so they returned to the Château — the painter walking slowly between the two women under the shadows of the great, dark trees. No one spoke. He walked on bewitched by them both; it was as though he were penetrated by a sort of feminine fluid, with which their near contact seemed to inundate him. He did not try to look at them, for he had them both close to him, and he even closed his eyes as if to feel their contact better. They guided him along, and drew him homeward, and he went forward bewitched by them both — the one on the left as much as the one on the right — which one was on the left, which was the mother, and which the child. He voluntarily gave himself up with an unconscious and subtle sensuality to the strangeness of this situation; he even sought to mingle them in his heart; and tried not to distinguish them in his thoughts, and he deluded his desire with the charm of this confusion. This mother and daughter so much alike — were they not one woman? And the child had she not come into the world only to revive the old love for the mother?

He opened his eyes when they reached the château and it seemed to him that he had passed through the sweetest moments of his life; he had experienced the

strangest, the most unanalytical, the most complete emotion, that a man could feel, he was intoxicated with the same passionate tenderness from the seduction emanating from two different women.

"What a beautiful night it has been," he said, when they again stood in the lamp-light of the salon.

"I don't feel I want to go to bed to-night," cried Annette. "I could pass the whole night out of doors when it is beautiful like this."

"But, my child — it is half past eleven," cried the Countess, looking at the clock. "You must go to bed at once."

They wished each other good-night, and separated, each going to their own apartment. And Annette who had no wish to go to bed was sound asleep in a minute.

The next morning at the usual hour, when the maid had drawn back the curtains, opened the shutters and arranged the little breakfast table by the side of the bed, she looked at her mistress who was still half asleep.

"Madame la Comtesse already looks much better than yesterday," she said.

"Do you think so?"

"Oh! yes. Madame's face is more restful."

The Countess without looking at herself in the mirror, knew that what her maid said was true. Her heart was light, she could not feel it beating, and she felt keenly alive. The blood which flowed through her veins was no longer hot and charged with fever as it had been yesterday, when it rushed through her overwrought and restless body. This morning, it was flowing gently and evenly, she was enveloped in a sense of well-being and comfort. She experienced a feeling of delightful and happy confidence. When the servant

had gone she looked in the mirror; she was a little surprised, for she felt so well that she expected to find herself looking several years younger in one night. Then she thought how childish it was to think so, and after looking in the mirror again, she resigned herself to the fact that it was only her color that was clearer, and the dark lines had disappeared and the lips had more life in them than the night before. She felt an inward contentment and she smiled as she thought: "Yes! in a few days I shall be quite myself again. I was too broken down to get well so quickly." But she stayed a very long time seated before her dressing-table, where all the little instruments of coquetry in ivory and silver bearing her initials and crest, were laid out ready for use on a doily of mousseline de soie, bordered with lace, before the beautiful mirror in cut crystal; there were a few in steel, fine and of odd shapes, like instruments of surgery that are used for operating on children's wounds, then there were round and soft pads in feathers, swansdown, the skin of some beast, used to spread over her soft flesh the caress of scented powders and perfumes in paste or liquid. For a long time she used them with her skilled hands; going from lip to temple, she touched here and there with a touch softer than a kiss. She corrected shades that she found imperfect, enhanced the beauty of the eyes and the line of the eyebrow. When she was ready to go down-stairs, she felt almost sure that the first look Olivier would give her, would not be a dissatisfied one.

"Where is M. Bertin?" she asked as she passed a servant in the hall.

"He is in the garden, Madame," replied the man. "He is playing lawn tennis with Mademoiselle."

She could now hear their voices in the distance crying out the points.

One after another, first the painter's full, deep voice, then the clear tones of the young girl called out " 15," " 30," " 40," " advantage," " advantage all," "advantage," "Game."

The orchard where the tennis courts were laid out was a great square of grass planted with apple-trees, and closed in by the park, the kitchen garden, and the farms belonging to the château. At the end of the slope which limited it to three sides, like the defenses of an intrenched camp, some flowers had been planted, long borders of all sorts of flowers, some wild, some cultivated — quantities of roses, pinks, sunflowers, fuchsias, mignonette and many others, which gave the air, as Bertin expressed it, the taste of honey. Besides, there were some bees. The hives stood in a row, with their domes of straw up against the fruit wall of the kitchen garden; the bees were busy all day long and overspread the flowery field with their buzzing and yellow flight. In the very center of the orchard some apple-trees were growing, and so as to obtain the necessary space for the tennis courts and tarred wire enclosure, from here the space was partitioned off, and then separated into two camps that were splendidly fitted for the purpose.

Annette was on one side, bare-headed, with her black skirt pinned up, showing her ankles, and several inches above, when she sprang to catch the flying ball. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks bright, but she was tired and out of breath and greatly annoyed at the correct and sure play of her opponent. Bertin wore a white flannel shirt and trousers, tightened at

the loins with a gay colored belt, and a white peaked cap.

He coolly waited for the ball, judging correctly where it would fall; he received and returned it without exertion or hurry, but with the graceful ease, keen attention and professional skill that he showed in all exercises.

Annette was the first to see her mother. "Good morning, mama," she cried out. "Just wait one minute while I take this ball."

This distraction of a moment made her lose it. The ball passed against her, quick and low, almost rolling; it touched the ground, then went out of court.

Bertin called out "Game" and Annette looked at him in surprise, then accused him of having taken advantage while she was talking to her mother.

Julio straightened up and went after the ball; these lost balls had deceived him many times this morning; they went off into the bushes just like partridges. This one, however, rolled gently before him on the grass, so he trotted up behind it, picked it up daintily in his jaws, and wagging his tail brought it back to his mistress.

The painter now turned to wish Madame de Guilleroy good-morning, but he was animated by the contest and anxious to get back to another game. He was enjoying himself and pleased to feel that he was in such good form. He only gave a passing glance at the beautiful face that had been so carefully got up just for him.

"You will excuse me, dear Countess," he said. "I am very warm and I do not wish to get cool. I am afraid I shall get neuralgia. You will excuse me?"

They commenced another game.

"Why, certainly," she said, "please continue your game."

She sat down on a heap of hay that had just been mowed down, to give free field to the players, and with heart suddenly grown a little sad she watched their play.

Annette was angry that she lost always and became more animated and excited. From one end to the other of the court came cries of disdain, then of triumph or an impetuous outburst as she sprang to and fro. Her hair came down and untwisted and fell on her shoulders; she seized it impatiently and in a few seconds, holding the racquet between her knees, she screwed it up and roughly stuck a tortoise shell pin through the great coil.

"*Hein!* Isn't she pretty like that and as fresh as the morning," Bertin called out to the Countess.

Yes, she was young, she could run about, be warm and get red in the face, let her hair fall down, brave all, dare anything, because she was pretty through it all.

They commenced another game and the Countess, feeling more and more melancholy, knew that Olivier preferred this game of ball — this exciting, childish pleasure — just like cats running after paper balls, to the pleasure of sitting with her on this warm morning, and she felt that she was against him and yet loved him.

When the clock in the distance struck the first stroke of the hour for luncheon it seemed that she was being delivered from something, that a weight was lifted from her heart, but as she returned to the house, holding his arm, he said:

"I have been amusing myself this morning like a youngster. It is good to be young or to imagine for the moment that one is young. Ah! yes! Youth is everything. When one has no wish to run about one is finished."

When they got up from the table the Countess, who for the first time the day before had missed going to the cemetery, proposed that they should go together, so they all three started for the village.

They had to cross a wood where a little stream flowed through, which they called Rainette, because it was full of small frogs; then they had to cross the end of the plain before arriving at the church, which was built among a group of houses where the grocer, baker, butcher and the café, and a few other modest tradespeople from whom the peasants bought their provisions, had their stores.

It was a silent and meditative walk; the thought of the dead oppressed them all. When they arrived at the cemetery the two women knelt and prayed on the tomb for a long time. The Countess, bowed down and motionless, had her handkerchief pressed against her eyes. She was afraid to cry for fear the tears would flow on her cheeks. She prayed, but not in the way that she had prayed before — by a sort of evocation of her mother, by a hopeless call to her under the marble of the tomb, until she believed in her heart-rending emotion that the dead was listening to her — but now she simply repeated the sacred words of the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria.* That day she would not have had the strength, and the intense application of mind which she needed for this sort of cruel communication without reply, with that which alone lived

of the being whose body was hidden under the damp earth below. Other obsessions had penetrated into her woman's heart which had stirred and bruised her, and her fervent prayer went up to heaven full of obscure supplications. She implored God, the inexorable God who has thrown on the earth all the poor creatures, to have pity on her as much as he had had for the one that he had called unto him. She could not say what she asked him. She was afraid of something, but she did not know what it was. Her fears were confused and hidden, but she felt that she had need of Divine aid, of a supernatural help against the approaching danger and the inevitable sadness that would follow. Annette, with closed eyes, after having muttered her prayers, had fallen into a reverie, because she did not want to rise from her knees before her mother.

Olivier Bertin looked at them both kneeling by the marble tomb and thought what a splendid picture he could make, and regretted that he could not then and there make a sketch of them. On their walk back they talked of the human existence, stirring gently the bitter and poetical idea of a compassionate and discouraged philosophy, which is a frequent subject of conversation between men and women whose lives fate has hurt a little and whose hearts mingle when confiding their troubles.

Annette was not old enough for these thoughts and was little interested in what they were saying. She went off every few minutes to gather the wild flowers that were growing along the hedges. But Olivier wanted to keep her near him. He did not like to see her running away all the time, and his eye followed

her wherever she went. It annoyed him that she was more eager to note the varied colors of the flowers than to listen to what he was saying. He felt a great annoyance to think that he was not able to fascinate and dominate her as he did her mother; he would have liked to have stretched out his hand and seized hers, to hold her back, and forbid her to run away. He felt she was too active, too young, too indifferent, too free — free as a bird. She was like a young dog that would not be mastered, that would not come back, who has in its veins the independent spirit and that pretty instinct of liberty that the voice and the whip have not had time to conquer.

To entice her back, he dropped their serious talk and began to speak on gayer subjects, and now and then he turned to question her, trying to awaken in her a desire to listen and arouse her woman's curiosity, but it seemed that the capricious wind of the heavens was blowing in Annette's head, just like it was on the waving, golden ears of corn, and carrying and dispersing her attention into space, for she had scarcely replied the commonplace answer that was expected of her, which she gave with an absent look, than she returned to her flowers. At last Bertin was exasperated and bit his lips in boyish impatience, and as she came up to ask her mother to carry her first bunch of flowers, so that she could pick another, he caught her by the shoulder and tightened his grasp on her arm so that she could not escape. She laughed and struck at him, trying with all her might to get free. Then, matured by a man's instinct, he employed the means of the weak, and not being able to get her to give her attention, he bought it by tempting her coquetry.

"Tell me," he said, "what flowers do you prefer? I will have a brooch made for you."

She looked at him in surprise.

"A brooch! How?" she exclaimed.

"In stones of the same color; in rubies if it is the poppy, in sapphires for the cornflower, with little leaves of emeralds."

Annette's face lit up with delight, with that joyful look which promises and presents bring to women's faces.

"The cornflower," she said promptly. "It is so pretty."

"That goes for the cornflower, then," said the artist; "we will go and order it as soon as we return to Paris."

She did not go off again. She was drawn to him by the thought of the jewel. She was already trying to imagine what it would be like. "Does it take long to do a thing like that?" she asked as she clung to his arm.

He laughed, seeing that his bait had taken. "I don't know; that depends if there are any difficulties, but we will hurry up the jeweler."

A dismal thought crossed her mind. Her face clouded. "Oh! what a shame! I won't be able to wear it now I am in mourning."

He pressed her arm and drew her closer to him. "*Eh bien!* little one," he said, looking down at her, "you can keep your brooch until you are out of mourning; that won't stop you from looking at it."

Like the evening before, he was walking between them both, held closely — a prisoner between their shoulders, and so as to look into their blue eyes, so

alike, with their specks of black points, he spoke to each in turn, turning his head first to one, then to the other. The full sun dazzled them, but now he did not confuse the Countess with Annette, as he did yesterday, but he blended the young girl more and more with the remembrance of what the mother had been. He wanted to embrace them both, the one for letting him refind on her cheek and on her neck a little of the pink and white freshness that he had tasted so long ago, and which he saw again miraculously reappearing; the other because he loved her always and he always felt coming from her the powerful call of an old love. He knew and felt that his passion, which had been a little weak for a long time, and his affection for her, had been revived at the sight of her resurrected youth.

Annette went off again to pick flowers. Olivier did not call her back again; it seemed as if the touch of her arm and the satisfaction of the joy he had given her had pacified him, but his eye followed her every movement with that pleasure that one feels in looking at people and things which draw and fascinate our eyes. When she came back, carrying a sheaf, he breathed more deeply, seeking, without knowing it, some thing from her, a little of her breath or the warmth of her body as she brushed against him. He looked at her rapturously, as one looks at the morning dawn, as one listens to music; with a start of pleasure when she stooped down and then rose again, lifting her two arms at the same time to arrange her hair. And then stronger and stronger, from hour to hour, she stirred him, and brought back more and more the days that had passed; she had little laughs, pretty ways, certain movements which brought back to his mouth the taste

of kisses that had been given and returned long, long ago.

She made of the distant past of which he had lost the exact sensation, something that was like to a present dream; she jumbled his thoughts together — the epochs, the dates, the ages of his heart; she mixed up and rekindled his chilled emotions, and blended days that had passed with days that were to come — the yesterday with the to-morrow —the remembrance with the future hope.

He asked himself, in searching his memory, if the Countess in her youthful days had had this supple charm, this grace of a young fawn, these daring, capricious ways, like the grace of an animal which runs and frisks about in gambols. No! She had been less wild, more of a hothouse flower. A town bred girl, then a woman of society, she had never drank the air of the fields and lived among the trees and woods; she had grown up beautiful in the garden of flowers under the protecting shadow of its walls, and not under heaven's full bright sun like Annette.

When they got back to the château the Countess sat down at the little low table in the recess of the wide window and wrote some letters. Annette went up to her room and the painter went out again. He walked with slow steps, a cigar in his mouth, his hands behind his back, along the roads outside the park, but he did not go far enough to lose sight of the white façade or the pointed roof of the château. The moment it disappeared from his view behind the trees or the dense shrubbery he felt as though a shadow had crossed his heart, like when the sun is hidden by clouds, and when he again saw it through the opening of the foliage he

stopped for a moment and looked at the two straight lines of the upstair windows. Then he walked on again.

He felt excited and happy. Happy at what? At everything. The air seemed so pure to him, it was so good to be alive this day; he felt again in his body the buoyancy of youth, the wish to run and catch in his hands the yellow butterflies as they flew to and fro over the fields, as though they were suspended at the end of an elastic thread. He sang some operatic airs. Several times he repeated the celebrated air by Gounod, *Laisse-moi contempler ton visage,* and discovered in the beautiful words a tender, deeper expression than he had ever felt before.

He asked himself what had happened to make him feel so different from yesterday. Such a short time had elapsed. Only yesterday in Paris he was discontented with everything, thoroughly disgusted with life, and now to-day he was happy, calm, satisfied with all; it seemed as though an affable god must have changed his soul. "That obliging god," he thought, "might have changed my body at the same time and made me a little younger."

He looked up and saw Julio, who was searching in the thickets. He called him and when the dog came and laid his shapely little head with its long crinkly ears on his hand he sat down on the grass to be able to play with him better; said nice little things to him in dog language, and took him on his knees and fondled him, just as women do whose hearts are stirred on all occasions.

In the evening after dinner, instead of going for a

stroll like the night before, they passed the *soirée* in the drawing room *en famille.*

"We must be going back to Paris," said the Countess, looking up suddenly from her embroidery.

"Oh! don't speak of that yet," cried Olivier. "You did not want to leave Roncières before I came, why do you want to go back as soon as I arrive?"

"But, *mon cher ami,*" she said, "we cannot all three stay here indefinitely."

"We are not thinking of staying indefinitely, but just a few days more. I have stayed with you for several weeks at a time before."

"Yes, but under other circumstances, when the house was open to every one."

"Oh, mama," said Annette in a wheedling tone, "don't go back yet; let us stay just two or three days more. I am learning to play tennis so well, I am *so* angry when I lose and then afterwards I am *so* pleased that I have made some progress."

Only that same morning the Countess had planned to prolong this mysterious visit of her friend until the following Sunday, and now she wanted to return to Paris without knowing why. She had hoped that this day would be so happy, but it had left in her soul a penetrating sadness — fears that she could not understand — clinging and confused like a presentiment. When she was alone in her room she tried to think what had caused this new attack of melancholy. Had she undergone one of those imperceptible emotions of which the touch is so transient that the cause cannot be remembered, but whose vibration lingers in the most sensitive chords of the heart? Perhaps. But

what? She remembered some unavowable vexations in the many phases of sentiment through which she had passed, but they were really too small for her to be cast down about them. "I am unreasonable," she thought. "I ought not to torment myself like this."

She opened her window to breathe the fresh air of the night, and she stayed there, leaning her elbows on the window-sill, looking out at the clear silvery moon.

A slight noise made her look below. Olivier was walking up and down before the château. "Why did he say he was going to his room?" she thought. "Why did he not tell me he was going out in the garden? He might have asked me to go with him. He knows so well that it would have made me very happy. What is he dreaming of now?"

This idea that he did not want her to walk with him, that he preferred to be alone this beautiful night, by himself, smoking a cigar — for she could see the little red speck of fire — alone, when he could have given her the joy of taking her with him; this idea that he did not need her filled her with a new ferment of bitterness.

She was going to close the window so as not to see him, or be tempted to call him, when he looked up and saw her.

"*Tiens!* Are you star-dreaming, Countess?" he cried.

"Yes, and you also, it seems to me," she replied.

She could not resist saying:

"Why did you not tell me you were going out?"

"I only wanted to smoke one cigar. I was just going in."

"Then good-night, *mon ami.*"

"Good-night, Countess."

She drew in as far as her low chair and sat down and buried her face in her hands. Later, when she rang for her maid, the girl, seeing her mistress' eyes were red, said with compassion: *"Ah! Madame va encore se faire une vilaine figure pour demain."*

The Countess slept very badly that night. She was restless and tormented with nightmares. When she awoke next morning, before ringing for her maid, she drew back the curtains and opened the windows herself to look in her mirror. Her features were drawn, the eyelids swollen, her complexion very sallow, and the sorrow that she felt was so great that she wanted to send down word that she was ill, so as to stay in her room and not show herself until the evening. Then the wish to go back to Paris became so imperative that it superseded all other thoughts. She wanted to go at once, by the first train, and leave this clear country, where in its full summer daylight one saw too well the ineffaceable lines of grief and life.

In Paris one lives in the half-light of the apartments, where the rich curtains, even in full daylight, only let a soft, mellow light enter. There she would be herself again, in her proper setting — beautiful, with her clear pale skin and shadowy eyes looking their best in the half-toned, subdued light. Then Annette's face passed before her eyes, high-colored and rough tumbled hair, so fresh when she ran about playing tennis. Now she understood the unknown uneasiness which she had suffered.

It was not that she was jealous of her daughter's beauty. No! no! that would be despicable; it was not that, but she felt and she admitted now for the first

time that, when Olivier was near, she ought never to show herself in the brightness of the summer sun beside her daughter.

She rang the bell and before drinking her tea she gave orders for their return. She wrote some telegrams, cabled the menu for dinner that evening, settled the accounts she had incurred in the country, gave out her last instructions, and had everything arranged in less than an hour; she was now a prey to a feverish and growing impatience. When she went down Annette and Olivier, who had been informed of her decision, questioned her with surprise; then, seeing that she would not give any reason for this abrupt departure — at least, no precise reason — they grumbled and sulked and showed their dissatisfaction up to the moment when they separated at the terminus in Paris.

The Countess held out her hand to say good-bye to the painter.

"Will you dine with us to-morrow?" she asked.

"Certainly I will come," he said, still a little sulky. "But all the same I do not think it was nice of you to do what you have done. We were so comfortable down there, all three together."

CHAPTER III

As soon as the Countess was alone in her *coupé* with her daughter, and they were being driven rapidly home, a sense of tranquillity and peace came over her. It was as though she had gone through a redoubtable crisis. She breathed freely. She looked out of the window and smiled as they passed through the streets. She saw again with pleasure this beautiful

city, of which the real Parisians seem to always carry the familiar details in their eyes and hearts.

Here were her favorite shops; they were now nearing the jewelers; she remembered the merchant's face that she had so often seen behind his *vitrine* — above were the salons of Madame X, who made such exquisite lingerie. She breathed freely, she was in her own loved city again, and she was saved. Saved from what? She was at rest. Why? She was confident. About what?

When the *coupé* stopped under the archway of the carriage entrance she stepped out lightly and then glided up the dim wide staircase, whose subdued light came through the stained glass windows; then into the rich darkened *salon,* and on into the soft light of her bedroom. There she stood for a few moments, happy to be there in the security of this vague, hazy Paris day. There was no cruel, dazzling sunlight here — one could leave to the imagination, one could show what one liked and hide what one liked. The unreasonable remembrance of the bright light which bathed the country still remained with her, like the impression of a suffering that she had undergone. When she came down dressed for dinner her husband was just coming in. He kissed her with affection and said, smiling:

"*Ah! ma chère,* I knew well enough that friend Bertin would bring you back. I did not do a foolish thing in sending him to you."

Annette looked at her father and mother with gravity and said in the droll voice that she had when she joked without laughing:

"Oh! but papa, if you knew what a lot of trouble he had. Mother could not be persuaded to leave Roncières; he had to force her."

The Countess looked confused and said nothing. No one came that evening; orders had been given that they were not at home to anyone. Madame de Guilleroy spent all the next day in the shops, choosing and ordering all the pretty things that she required.

Since her girlhood — in fact, almost since her childhood — she had always enjoyed the long fittings before the mirror in the big dressmakers' show-rooms. So as soon as she was back in town she felt pleased at the thought of all the details of this minute repetition in the grooves of the Parisian life. She liked to see the *vendenses,* hastening towards her — their smiles, their suggestions, their interrogations; and madame, the *conturière,* the *modiste* and the *corsetière* were for her persons of worth that she treated as artists when she explained her opinion and asked their advice. She liked still more to feel the skillful hands of the young girls about her as they tried on her gowns and made her turn round and about before her gracious reflection. The touch of their light fingers upon her skin, on her neck, in her hair, was one of the softest *petites gourmandises* that she enjoyed in her life of *femme élégante.*

This day, however, it was with a certain feeling of uneasiness that she was going to stand without a veil and bareheaded before these sincere mirrors.

But her first visit to the *modiste* reassured her. The three hats that she tried on suited her to perfection; there was no doubt about it, and when the *vendeuse* said to her with sincerity, "*Oh, Madame la Comtesse, les blondes ne devraient jamais quitter le deuil,*" she left the show-room quite contented and went full of confidence to the other *fournisseurs.*

When she arrived home she found a little note from the Duchess, who had called while she was out, saying she would come again in the evening. Then she wrote some letters. Then she sat musing for a while. It seemed surprising that this simple change of abode had drawn back into a past which seemed already far away, the great unhappiness which she had felt. It seemed impossible that it was only yesterday that she returned from Roncières, for the state of her feelings was so modified since she returned to Paris that it was as if this little change had cauterized her wounds.

When Bertin arrived at the dinner hour he looked at her in surprise.

"How beautiful you are this evening, *mon amie.* Why, you are perfectly dazzling," he exclaimed. And his few words filled her with a warm wave of happiness.

When they left the table the Count, who had a passion for billiards, challenged Bertin to a game, and the two women went with them into the billiard room, where the Countess ordered the coffee and *liqueurs* to be served. The men were still playing when the Duchess was announced. They left their game and all went into the salon.

Madame de Mortemain was full of sympathy for the family's bereavement. For several minutes it seemed by the doleful tones of the conversation that everyone was on the verge of tears, but little by little, after the Duchess had feelingly expressed her sympathy and condolences, they drifted into lighter talk. Then Bertin got up and took Annette by the hand and placed her under her mother's portrait, with the light from the reflector falling from the picture onto the young girl. "Isn't this enough to startle one?" he said.

The Duchess was so surprised that for a few moments she remained staring at Annette. "*Dieu!*" she exclaimed at last, "*Dieu!* is it possible, is it possible? It is a resurrection. How could I not have noticed it when I came in. Ah! *ma petite Any, ma petite Any!* Now I see you again. I who knew you so well in your first mourning. No, not in your first, in your second," she corrected, "for you had already lost your father. And this Annette in black like that, why it's her mother when she was young come back to earth. *Quel miracle!* Without this portrait one would not have noticed it. Your daughter resembles you very much in reality, but the portrait — why, it's marvelous, marvelous!"

Musadieu came in at this moment, having heard of their return, and intending to be the first to present "the homage of his sympathetic condolences."

He stopped in his speech when he saw the young girl standing before the picture, with the soft light above thrown over her. She seemed to be the living sister to the painting.

"*Ah! par exemple!*" he exclaimed, "that is the most astonishing thing I have yet seen."

And the Corbelles came and marveled in their turn with a more discreet ardor. Their conviction always followed opinions that had already been established.

The Countess felt a dull pain at her heart; it seemed as if the astonished exclamations of all these people had combined to make her suffer. Without saying a word she looked at her child, standing beside the portrait and she became unnerved. In her pain she wanted to cry out:

"Please be quiet. Say nothing more. Do I not know

myself how much she resembles what I once was?"

All the evening she was very quiet. She had again lost the confidence that she had refound when she arrived home.

Bertin was talking with her when the Marquis de Farandal was announced.

When the painter saw him come into the room and walk towards the mistress of the house, he got up and stepped behind the divan on which they were sitting, murmuring:

"*Allons bon!* here's this big fool now," then having made the tour of the room he reached the door and went out.

After the Countess had greeted the newcomer and thanked him in a few words for his kind expressions of sympathy, she turned round to look for Olivier, to take up the thread of their conversation, which had been upon a matter of great interest to her.

"What! has the *grand homme* gone?" she asked.

"I think he has, my dear," replied her husband. "I saw him go out *à l'anglaise.*"

She was surprised, and remained thoughtful for a moment, and then began to talk to the Marquis.

They went away very early; these intimate friends were the only ones that she was at home to in these days of their mourning.

When she was lying in her bed that night all the agonies that she had felt in the country came back to her. She detailed them more fully, she verified them more clearly. She felt old! That evening for the first time she had understood that in her *salon,* where, until now, she had been the only one admired, complimented and *fêted,* her daughter would take her

place. She had understood all at once in feeling the homage that had been paid to Annette. In this kingdom, the house of a beautiful woman, her kingdom, where she supported no umbrage, where she removed with a discreet and tenacious care all formidable comparisons, where she only allowed her equals to enter to try to make them her subjects, she saw clearly that her daughter would now become the sovereign.

How odd it was what she felt when all eyes turned to Annette, as Bertin held her by the hand standing beneath the picture! Every one looked at Annette, no one had turned to her. She had been so accustomed to hear compliments and flattery every time her guests looked at her portrait. She was so sure of the words of adulation, that she had come to take them as a matter of course, and scarcely took any notice, and yet all the same the words of praise were very sweet to her, and now this unexpected surrender had come, this falling off, this admiration given suddenly but entirely to her daughter. She was not jealous; it did not affect her at all in that way. She was no more moved than if it had been some trivial thing of no possible consequence. As she had one of those natures which after the critical moment — after the first despondency — react and find arguments of consolation, she thought that, once her dear child was married, when she no longer lived under the same roof, she would not have to support this incessant comparison, which was beginning to be too painful when Olivier was near. But only when he was near. However, the shock had been very strong this time.

During the night she was very feverish and scarcely slept; in the morning she awoke languid and depressed,

and then she felt a great wish to be comforted, to be cured — to ask help from some one who could cure all her troubles and all her miseries, both moral and physical.

She felt really so ill, so altogether worn out that she decided to consult her doctor. Perhaps she was going to become very ill! It was not natural that she should pass through these successive stages of suffering and peace within so short a time of each other, so she sent a telegram to her physician and waited for him.

He arrived about 11 o'clock. He was one of those serious, high-class doctors whose decorations and titles guarantee their capacity, and whose *savoir-faire* equals at least the *simple savoir*. In the matter of feminine ailments he used a few tactful words that cured them more surely than any medicines. He entered the room, bowed, looked well at his patient, then said with a smile:

"*Allons! Madame.* It is nothing very serious. With eyes like yours one cannot be very ill."

That was a good beginning and she felt very grateful to him. She then told him all her ailments, her nervous attacks, the fits of melancholy, but she did not dwell on the fact that she was very worried about her looks. After he had listened to her attentively, merely asking a question about her appetite, as though he knew quite well the secret nature of this feminine complaint, he sounded her heart, examined her, felt the flesh on her shoulders with the tips of his fingers, took her arm on the palm of his hand and weighed it. He understood with the intuition of a physician who lifts up all veils that she was consulting him far more for her beauty than for her health.

"Yes, we have here a case of anæmia," he said with his most professional air. "Nervous troubles. That is not astonishing, considering that you have just gone through a great sorrow. I am going to give you a little prescription that will put everything in good order. Above all, you must eat strengthening things; take the juice of meat, do not drink water, stop drinking wine, but drink plenty of beer. I can recommend an excellent brew. Do not tire yourself over anything, but walk as much as you can. Sleep well, and get fatter. That is all the advice I can give you, Madame, my beautiful client."

She had listened to him with the greatest attention, trying to find out if there was anything to really lay hold of.

She caught at his last phrase.

"Get fatter," she said. "Yes, I am too thin. Only a little while ago I was too stout, and probably I have weakened myself with dieting."

"Without doubt," answered the physician. "There is no harm in being thin if one has always been so, but when one gets thin on principle, it is always at the risk of something else. That, fortunately, is very quickly remedied. Good morning, Madame."

She felt better already, more active and hopeful. She sent a servant to order the beer for her luncheon, that he had recommended. She gave the man instructions to get it from the principal selling place, so as to have it fresher.

She was leaving the table when Bertin came in.

"Here I am again. It is always I," he said. "I have come to ask you something; have you anything to do this afternoon?"

"No, nothing. Why?"

"And Annette?"

"Nothing, either."

"Then can you come to see me about four o'clock?"

"Yes, but what about?"

"I am sketching my figure of the *Rêverie,* the picture I spoke to you about when I asked you if you would let Annette pose for me. It will be doing me a great favor if I could have only one hour to-day. Will you?"

The Countess hesitated. She was uneasy, without knowing why. However, she replied:

"Yes, I can arrange it. We will be at the studio at four o'clock."

"Thanks, so much. You are amiability personified."

And he went off to prepare his canvas and to study his subject, so as not to tire his model too much.

Then the Countess went out alone, on foot, to finish her shopping. She walked down the Rue de la Paix and the Avenue de l'Opéra, and then returned to the Boulevard Malesherbes with slow steps; she had walked well and was now feeling tired out. As she passed Saint-Augustin's she was tempted to go into the church and rest. She pushed open the padded door and gave a sigh of relief at feeling the cool air of the vast nave; then she took a chair and sat down.

She was religious in the same way that many Parisians are. She believed in God without a doubt, not being able to admit the existence of the Universe without the existence of a Creator, but she associated, as most people do, the attributes of the Divinity with the nature of the motive created as her eyes saw it.

She personified her Eternal Father according to what she knew of His work, without having for the foundation any clear ideas on what, in reality, could be the mysterious Creator. She believed firmly in religion, adored it theoretically, and feared it very vaguely, for she ignored in all conscience its intentions and its wills, having only a very limited confidence in the priests, whom she considered all as sons of peasants, who were recruits on duty in the Divine service.

Her father, who was a Parisian *bourgeois,* had not forced upon her any principles of religion. So until her marriage, she had observed its rites with a certain nonchalance. Then her new position regulated very strictly her apparent obligations towards the church, and she conformed with exactitude and punctuality to this light servitude. She was very much to the fore as patroness of several religious institutions and orphan asylums. She never missed the Sunday mass and helped the poor directly and indirectly through the medium of a priest, the vicar of her parish. She prayed often, as a matter of duty, in the same spirit that a soldier does his duty at the door of his commander. Sometimes she prayed because she was sad, especially when she suffered from Olivier's neglect. Without confiding in heaven, then, the cause of her supplications, treating God with the same naïve hypocrisy as her husband, she asked him to help her in her trouble. When her father died, and just recently when her mother died, she had had violent attacks of fervor, passionate supplications and outbursts towards Him who watches over and consoles us.

And here to-day in this church, where chance had brought her, she felt a great need of prayer, not a

prayer for any one or for any thing, but for herself alone, as she had prayed at her mother's grave. She needed aid from somewhere and she called upon God now in the same manner that she had called upon her physician in the morning.

She stayed a long time on her knees in the silence of the church, which was broken now and again by quiet footsteps. Then suddenly, as though a clock had struck in her heart, she had an awakening of her thoughts. She pulled out her watch, started on seeing that it was four o'clock, and hurried home to fetch her daughter, whom Olivier was already awaiting.

When they arrived at the studio, they found the artist studying on the canvas the pose of his *Rêverie*. His wish was to reproduce exactly what he had seen in the Parc Monceau, when walking there with Annette — a poor girl dreaming, with an open book on her knees. He had greatly hesitated whether he should make her ugly or pretty. If ugly there would be more character; it would awaken more thoughts, more emotion, and contain more philosophy. If pretty, she would be more bewitching, diffuse more charm, and would please better. The wish to make a study after his little friend decided him. *Rêveuse* should be pretty and would consequently realize her poetical dream one day or the other, while the ugly one would be condemned to a dream only — without end, without hope.

As soon as the two came in the artist rubbed his hands with satisfaction and said:

"*Eh bien!* Mademoiselle Nané. You and I are going to work together, eh?"

The Countess seemed thoughtful. She sat down in

a lounge chair and watched Olivier as he placed an iron garden chair in the light he wanted. He then opened his bookcase to look for a book. After hesitating a few minutes he turned to her and asked:

"What does your daughter read?"

"*Mon Dieu!* Just what you think. Give her a book by Victor Hugo."

"*La Légende des Siècles?*"

"Yes, that will do."

"*Petite,*" he said, turning to Annette, "sit down there and take this selection of verse, open at page . . . page 336. There you will find a piece called *Les Pauvres Gens.* Absorb it, drink in the words as one drinks the best of wine, gently, word by word, and let yourself be carried away by it; let yourself be moved by it. Listen, *petite,* to what your heart says to you. Then close the book, raise your eyes and think and dream. I am going to prepare my 'instruments of work' now." He went into a corner and triturated his palette. As he emptied on the fine wood the contents of the leaden tubes, which came out in thin, serpent-like twists of color, he turned round from time to time to look at the young girl, who was already interested in what she was reading.

As he looked at her his heart beat quickly, his fingers trembled, he forgot what he was doing and mixed the tones in blending the little pile of paste. A passionate emotion swept over him as he found himself before this black and blond apparition; in the same room, the same chair. After twelve years he stood before the resurrection of his past.

She had finished reading and her eyes were looking straight before her. As he went towards her he saw

two tears in her eyes, which began to roll slowly down her cheeks. Then he shook with that strong emotion that makes a man forget himself entirely, and trembling he turned to the Countess.

"God! isn't she beautiful?" he said hoarsely. Then he remained stupefied as he saw the livid and convulsed face of Madame de Guilleroy. Her large eyes were full of a sort of terror. She looked at them both, her daughter and her lover. He went up to her, feeling vaguely uneasy.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I want to speak to you," she said, gasping. She rose from her chair and turning to Annette she said quickly:

"Wait a moment, my child. I want to say a word to M. Bertin."

Then she walked quickly into the little room at the side, the little reception room, where he often made his visitors await him. He followed her, bewildered, not understanding at all. As soon as they were alone she grasped his two hands and said hoarsely:

"Olivier, Olivier, I implore you, do not let her pose any more."

He looked uneasy and asked:

"Why?"

"Why? Why?" she cried. "He asks why. My God! You do not understand why? *You. You.* God! Why didn't I see it sooner. I have only just discovered it. I can say nothing to you now — nothing. Fetch me my daughter. Tell her that I am ill, then order a carriage. I must go. You can come and call upon me in an hour's time. I will see you alone."

"But tell me what is the matter," he said.

She was almost hysterical.

"Go," she said quickly. "Leave me. I cannot speak to you here. Fetch my daughter and order a carriage."

He was obliged to obey her, and returned to the studio. Annette, without suspicion, had commenced to read again; her heart had been made very sad by the poetic and lamentable story by the celebrated author.

"Your mother is not well," the artist said. "She was taken faint as she went into the little room. Go to her. I will get some smelling salts."

He went to his room and fetched a flacon of salts.

He found the mother and her child in each other's arms, crying — Annette overcome by the pathetic story of *Les Pauvres Gens,* let her tears flow freely, and the Countess, with great slow tears in her own eyes, tried to comfort her.

He waited a few minutes, not daring to speak, and watched them. He began to feel oppressed himself with an incomprehensible melancholy. At last he said:

"Well, do you feel better?"

"Yes, a little," replied the Countess. "It is nothing. Did you order the carriage?"

"Yes, it will be here presently."

"Thank you, *mon ami,* it is nothing. I have had too much grief lately."

A few minutes later a servant appeared to say the carriage was at the door.

And Bertin, full of uneasy thoughts, helped his friend, who was still very pale and feeble, down the stairs. As he held her arm he could feel her heart beating quickly beneath her bodice.

When he was alone he asked himself, "What is the matter with her? Why this attack?" and he began to search for a reason, roaming around the truth without letting himself discover it. At last he approached it with hesitation.

"Surely she does not think that I am making love to her daughter," he said. "No! that would be too much."

And he fought against this supposed conviction with loyal and ingenious arguments; he became indignant that she could think that his sane and almost paternal affection for her daughter could have the appearance of any stronger sentiment. The more he thought of it the more annoyed he became with his friend; how dared she suspect him of such base, such unqualified infamy! He worked himself into a rage and he promised himself, when he called upon her presently, that he would express in strong terms exactly what he felt. He soon left the house to go to the Boulevard Malesherbes; he was impatient to have her explain.

As he walked along he thought with increasing impatience about just what he would say, the arguments and phrases which would justify him and avenge such a suspicion.

He found her lying on the sofa, her face lined with suffering.

"Well," he said dryly. "Kindly explain to me, my dear friend, the meaning of the strange scene a little while ago."

"What! You have not yet understood?" she said brokenly.

"No! I must confess."

"*Voyons,* Olivier. Look well into your heart."

"Into my heart?"

"Yes. Into the depths of your heart."

"I do not understand; you must explain better."

"Search in the bottom of your heart and see if there is nothing that is dangerous for you and for me."

"I repeat to you," he said slowly, emphasizing each word, "*that I do not understand.* I know that there is something in your imagination, but in my conscience I can see nothing."

"I am not speaking of your conscience. I am speaking of your heart."

"I am not good at guessing enigmas. I beg of you to be more explicit."

Then slowly lifting her two hands, she took her friend's hands in hers and kept them, and said as if each word was tearing her heart:

"Take care, *mon ami,* or you will love my child."

He pulled his hands away roughly and with the indignation of one who is innocent and fights against a shameful accusation — with quick gestures and increasing excitement, he defended himself, and accused her in his turn for having such mean, such despicable suspicions.

She let him talk for a long time, but he could not convince her. She was sure of what she had said.

"I do not suspect you, my friend," she said at last. "You are ignorant of what is passing in you, just as I was ignorant of it until this morning. You are behaving to me now as if I had accused you of wishing to captivate Annette's heart. Oh! no! no! I know how loyal and worthy of all esteem and confidence you

are. I only beg of you, I implore you, to look into the depths of your heart and see if the affection which you are beginning to have, in spite of yourself, for my daughter has not a character a little different from simple friendship."

He became angry and more and more agitated. He began again to plead his loyalty, as he had pleaded to himself in the street on his way to see her. She waited until he had finished, then, without anger or any excitement whatever, but deathly pale, she said:

"Olivier, I know all that you say to me and I think the same as you. I know you are loyal, but I am sure I am not making a mistake. Listen, reflect, and understand, *mon ami.* My daughter resembles me too much. She is just like what I was when you commenced to love me, so much so that you are beginning to love her also."

"Then," he cried, "you dare to throw in my face such a thing on the mere supposition of this ridiculous argument — *he loves me, my daughter resembles me — he will get to love her.*"

But seeing that the Countess became more and more deathlike, he continued in a quieter tone:

"Do not be so absurd, my dear Any; it is simply because I find *you* in *her* that the child pleases me so much. It is you and you only that I love, dear, when I look at her."

"Yes, that is why I am commencing to suffer so much, and that is why I am filled with dread. You have not yet analyzed your feelings, but very soon you will not be able to deceive yourself," replied the Countess sadly.

"Any, you must be mad to think such a thing."

"Do you require some proofs?" she asked.

"Yes."

"In spite of all my persuasions you have not been to Roncières for three years, but you rushed down quickly enough when the proposition was made that you should fetch us."

"*Ah! par exemple!* You reproach me with not having left you alone down there, knowing that you were so sick after your mother's death."

"Very well. I will not argue the matter. But here again — your wish to see Annette is so imperative that you could not let even to-day pass without asking me to take her to your home under the pretext of posing for you."

"And you did not imagine that it was you whom I called to see?"

"You are now arguing against yourself; you are trying to convince yourself that it is so, but you cannot deceive me. Listen again. Why did you leave the house so abruptly last evening, when the Marquis de Farandal came in the room? Do you know?"

He hesitated, very surprised. Why had he left? He was beginning to feel strangely uneasy. He was disarmed by this observation. Then he said hesitatingly:

"Well . . . I scarcely know . . . I was tired, and then to be perfectly frank with you — that big imbecile annoys me."

"Since when?"

"Always."

"Pardon me, *mon ami,* but I used to hear you praise him very warmly. You liked him once upon a time. Be perfectly sincere, Olivier."

"Well, it is possible that the great tenderness which I have for you makes me like all who belong to you, so much so as to modify my opinion on that conceited prig. It was all right when I met him at the club occasionally, but I get annoyed when I see him at your house almost every day."

"My daughter's house will not be mine," said the Countess quietly. "That will be sufficient. I know your high principles, and I know that you will think over seriously what I have said to you. When you fully understand you will see that I have pointed out to you a great danger while there is time for you to escape it. And you will take care. Let us talk of something else now," she concluded as she lay back weakly on the sofa.

He did not attempt to discuss the subject farther. He was thoroughly uneasy, not knowing what to think; he needed to be alone to be able to reflect. After they had talked on other matters for a quarter of an hour he left her.

CHAPTER IV

WITH slow steps Olivier Bertin returned home. He was disturbed and worried, as though he had just learned a shameful family secret. He tried to sound his heart, so as to see things clearly,— he tried to read the intimate pages of the interior book, those pages which are stuck so closely one to another, that oftentimes it is the hand of a stranger which separates and turns them over for us.

Most assuredly he did not think he was in love with Annette! The Countess, whose annoying jealousy was

always on the alert, had anticipated this danger, and had signaled it before it existed.

But this peril, *might* it exist to-morrow, next week, next month? It was to this sincere question that he tried to give a sincere answer. It was true, the *petite* stirred his tender feelings, but then those feelings were so numerous with a man that one ought not to confuse the offensive with the inoffensive. In this same tender manner he was fond of animals, especially cats. He could not look at their silky fur without being seized with an irresistible, almost sensual, wish to caress them; he loved to run his fingers over their soft and undulating back, and stroke and kiss their hair, which was so full of electricity.

The attraction which drew him to the young girl resembled, a little, these obscure and innocent desires, which are a part of all the incessant and unappeasable vibrations of the human nerves.

His eye of an artist and also his eye of a man, were beguiled by her freshness, by the blossoming of her young, clear life, by the sap of youth which radiated from her; and his heart being so full of reminiscences of his long friendship with her mother, found in the extraordinary likeness of Annette to the Countess a recall of old emotions,— emotions which had slept almost since the commencement of his love, and which had perhaps been shaken under the sensation of an awakening! Yes! that was it. This idea pleased him. He felt that he was now awake after years of sleep. If he had loved the child without suspecting it he would have felt when near her that animation of the entire being which makes a man different the moment that the flame of a new desire is alight. No,

this *petite* had only blown the old fire into a flame. It was still the mother, and the mother only, that he loved, and without a doubt a little more than he did before, on account of her daughter,— of this apparition who had come to them from the past. And he formulated this statement by this reassuring sophism, "One can love but once." The heart can be moved many times, when meeting another being, because each one exercises on another either an attraction or a repulsion. From all these influences are born friendships, fancies, the desire for possession — the quick and fleeting passion — but not true love. For real love to exist the two beings must be born for each other, they must be drawn to each other by so many tastes that they must have in common, by so much affinity of the flesh, of the mind, of the character, and feel themselves bound by things of all nature, that it forms a rope of attachments. In short, that which one loves is not so much Mrs. X. or Mr. Z. . . . It is a *woman,* or a *man,* a creature without name, who has come from Nature, that wonderful female, with organs, a heart, a soul, who, like a magnet, attracts our organs, our eyes, our lips, our heart and our thought, all our sensual and intelligent appetites. One likes a certain type — that is to say, we like in one person a reunion of all the human qualities which can separately seduce us in the others.

For the artist, Madame de Guilleroy had been this type, and the duration of their friendship, of which he had not grown weary, had proved this to him in a convincing manner. Then Annette physically resembled what her mother had been, even to deceiving the eyes, so in that case it was not astonishing that his

man's heart should be caught a little, without sweeping him away. He had loved a woman. Another was born of her — her image. He could not really defend himself from carrying back to the second a light, affectionate remnant of the passionate attachment which he had had for the first. There was nothing wrong in that. His look and his memory had only been illusioned by this apparent resurrection, but his instinct had not led him into any error, for he had never felt for the young girl the least confusion of a sensual desire.

But then the Countess accused him of being jealous of the Marquis. Was it true? He made another severe examination of his conscience, and admitted that it was true; he really was a little jealous. But after all, that was not astonishing. Isn't one often jealous of men who make love to a woman, no matter who the woman is? Hasn't one sometimes felt, when in the street, in a restaurant, or at a theater, a little enmity against the man who brushes by or who comes into the room where you are with a beautiful girl clinging to his arm? Every man who possesses a woman is a rival. He is a satisfied male, a conqueror whom the other males envy. And then, without entering into the consideration of physiology, if it was normal that he had a sympathy for Annette that was a little overwrought by his tenderness for her mother, was it not then natural that he felt grow up in him a slight animosity against her future husband? Why, it was perfectly natural! However, he would try to overcome this bad feeling which he had for the youth. In his innermost thoughts, there still existed a bitter discontent against himself and the Countess. Their every-day

relations would be embarrassing, now she had these suspicions. He would have to watch with scrupulous and tiring attention his every word, act, and look, every attitude that he took towards the young girl, because everything that he might do, everything he might say, would be suspected by the mother. When he arrived at his home he was in a thoroughly bad temper, and commenced to smoke cigarettes in the manner of a man whose nerves are irritated, who in his nervousness uses ten matches to light one smoke. In vain he tried to work. His hand, his eye, and his mind seemed unaccustomed to painting. It was as though he had forgotten how to use the brush, as though he had never known or practiced his art.

Finally he took a little canvas that had been commenced — a corner of a street where a blind woman was singing. He looked at it with an insuperable indifference, with such a powerlessness to continue it that he sat before it, his palette in his hand, and then forgot it, but all the time he was looking at it with a searching and attentive fixity.

Then the impatience of the time, which seemed to stand still, the interminable minutes, began to torment his intolerable feverishness.

Until his dinner, which he would take at the club, what should he do? since it was impossible to work. The idea of walking on the boulevards tired him in advance,— the streets, the people, the carriages, the shops filled him with disgust, and the thought of making a visit to no matter whom, made him take an instantaneous dislike to all the people he knew.

What should he do then? He walked to and fro in his studio; at each turn he looked at the clock,

whose hands were displaced by a few seconds. How well he knew this beat from the door to the cabinet full of curios and back again. He had tramped it so often — in moments of tense excitement, of warmth, of animation, at the flight of his imagination, at the zenith of his success, at the execution of fertile and easy work,— it was a delightful recreation, this walk to and fro in the gay warm studio; then in the hours of powerlessness and discouragement, in the miserable hours when nothing seemed to be worth an effort or a movement, it was the execrable tramp of a prisoner in his cell. If only he could sleep, if he could sleep just one hour on the divan! But it was impossible. He had worked himself into such an agitated state that he was trembling with exasperation. But why had he gotten into this sudden access of rage?

"This is absurd," he said viciously to his reflection in the mirror, "to have put myself into this violent state for such a ridiculous, insignificant cause. Bah!"

Then he thought he would take a book. The volume of the "*Légende des Siècles*" was still on the chair where Annette had left it; he opened it and read two pages of verse, but he could not see any meaning to it. He understood no more what he was reading than as if it had been written in a foreign language. He turned back the pages and began again, to see if it was really impossible for him to grasp the sense.

"*Allons bon!*" he said, after a vain effort. "I suppose my brain has gone on a vacation."

Suddenly an inspiration came to him as to the best way to pass these two hours before dinner. He ordered a warm bath, and he stayed in it stretched out, relieved and soothed; he laid there dreaming in the

warm water, until his valet brought his linen and awoke him from his half sleep.

When he arrived at the club he found his usual companions there. He was received with exclamations and open arms, for no one had seen him for several days.

"I have been in the country," he explained. All the men, with the exception of the landscape painter, Maldant, professed a profound contempt for the fields and the woods. Rocdiane and Landa went into the country, it was true, but only for the shooting. When on the moors and in the woods they only felt the pleasure of seeing the partridges, pheasants and quails fall beneath their shots, looking like tatters of feathers, or watching the little startled rabbits turning over on their heads, like clowns, five or six times in succession, and showing as they cut their capers the mesh of white hairs on their tail. Outside of this autumn and winter sport, they considered the country tame. Rocdiane remarked: "*Je préfère les petites femmes aux petits pois.*"

The dinner was the same as usual — noisy and jovial; they had some discussions, but nothing unforeseen burst out. Bertin, to forget himself, talked a great deal; his companions found him even more amusing than usual, but as soon as he had finished his coffee and played sixty points at billiards with Banker Liverdy he left them. He strolled along the boulevards, then round the Madeleine and the rue Taitbout, passed three times before the Vaudeville, wondering whether he should go in, stopped a cab to take him to the Hippodrome, then changed his mind, walked towards the Nouveau-Cirque, then abruptly made a half turn without premeditation — for no reason whatever, and

walked quickly up the Boulevard Malesherbes, slackening his pace as he neared Madame de Guilleroy's home.

"She will perhaps think it singular that I have come back again to-night," he said to himself. Then he reassured himself by thinking that there was nothing astonishing in calling a second time to ask how she was.

She was alone with Annette in the little *salon* at the end. They were again sitting under the rose lamp light working at the coverlet for the poor.

When he came in the room she said simply: "*Tiens!* it is you, *mon ami!*"

"Yes! I was anxious. I wanted to see you. How are you this evening? Feeling better, I hope?"

"Thanks, I am very well."

She waited a moment and then said, with marked intention:

"And you?"

He laughed carelessly and replied:

"Oh! I, I am very well — very well, indeed. Your fears were entirely without foundation."

She stopped knitting and raised her eyes and looked at him. An ardent look full of prayer and doubt.

"It is quite true," he said.

"So much the better," she replied with a smile that was a little forced.

He sat down, and for the first time in her house he felt ill at ease; there came again that sort of paralysis of ideas, but this time more complete than that which had gripped him in the afternoon as he stood before his canvas.

The Countess turned to her daughter. "You can continue, my child. It will not annoy M. Bertin."

"What was she doing?" he asked.

"She was studying a *fantaisie*."

Annette got up and went to the piano. Without thinking, his eye followed her, as it always did when he thought how pretty she was. Then he felt the mother's gaze upon him, and he turned his head quickly, as though he had been looking at something in the dim corners of the *salon*.

The Countess took up a little gold case from her work-table. It was a present he had given her. She opened it and offered him some cigarettes.

"Smoke, *mon ami*, you know I like it when we are alone here."

He obeyed. And Annette began to play her *fantaisie*.

It was old music — light and rippling, one of those soft airs that seem to have been inspired to the composer by a quiet moonlight evening in springtime.

"Whose is that?" Olivier asked.

"It is Schumann. It is little known, but it is very charming."

He wanted so to turn and look at Annette, but he did not dare. Just a slight movement, only a turn of his neck, and he could see her. Where he was sitting he could see at the side the light from the piano candles in the alcove, but he knew well that the Countess was watching him, so he sat motionless with eyes raised before him, seemingly interested in the wreath of gray smoke that he blew from his cigarette.

"That is all you have to say to me?" murmured Madame de Guilleroy.

He smiled.

"You must not want more for the moment," he said. "You know that music hypnotizes me, it drinks my thoughts. I will speak soon."

"*Tiens!*" she said. "Before mother died I was studying something for you. I have never let you hear it, but I will play it soon, when the *petite* has finished; you see if it is not a weird thing."

She was a very talented musician. She had a subtle comprehension of emotion, which ran through her notes. In this accomplishment she had one of her surest powers over the painter's feelings.

As soon as Annette had finished her sylvan symphony by Schumann, the Countess got up and took her place at the piano. As her fingers glided over the keys a strange wild melody filled the room — a melody in which all the phrases seemed some plaint — different plaints — numerous and changing, interrupted by a unique note, now dying away, now returning with a weird cry, falling in the midst of a light air, cutting it, scathing and shattering it, like a monotonous incessant cry of distress, the unappeased call of a struggling soul.

But Olivier was looking at Annette, who was sitting opposite to him, and he heard nothing. He had not understood the glorious music. He was looking at the child without thinking; his eyes were devouring her, it was as if he had been deprived of an habitual and good thing. He drank her in wholesomely, like one drinks a draught of clear fresh water when one is thirsty.

"*Eh bien!*" said the Countess. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Admirable, superb; whose is it?" he cried waking up.

"You don't know?" she asked in surprise.

"No."

"You don't really know?"

"No."

"Why, it is Schubert's."

"That doesn't surprise me," he said with an air of strong conviction. "It is simply superb. Do be kind and play it over gain."

She played again, and again he turned his head to look at Annette, but now he listened to the music, so as to taste two pleasures at the same time.

When Madame de Guilleroy came back to her seat he simply obeyed the natural duplicity of man, and was careful not to let his eyes rest on the young girl's profile as she sat knitting opposite her mother on the other side of the lamp. But, although he did not see her, he felt the joy of her presence, like when one is cold and one feels the nearness of a warm fire. The wish to cast at her some rapid furtive glances and bring them back quickly to the mother tormented him; he was like a schoolboy who wants to clamber up to the window to look quickly down the street while the teacher's back is turned.

He went away early for his words seemed as paralyzed as his mind, and his persistent silence might be interpreted wrongly. As soon as he was in the street he felt like wandering about; he had no wish to return to his lonely home. All music that he heard remained with him for a long time, throwing him into a reverie, which seemed to carry on the dream where the melody left off. As he wandered along, the beautiful chant of the wild notes came back to him — intermittent and fleeting — bringing some solitary lonely measures in its

train — distant as a far-away echo, then they were quiet, seeming to leave with the thoughts they had conjured up a reason for their coming, for the thoughts soared away in their flight to the Dream, traveling on in search of the tender Ideal. He turned to the left of the boulevard, and when he saw the beautiful little Parc Morceau he went into the central *allée,* which was brilliantly lit up by the electric lights. A guard walked by with slow steps, now and again a cab passed, a man sat on a bench reading a newspaper, bathed in the blue pale light thrown from the shining globe on the summit of the bronze pillar. Other focuses on the grass, in among the trees, reflected in the foliage and on the lawns their cold and powerful light, giving a pale-clear life to this large town garden.

Bertin walked along with his hands behind his back, thinking of the promenade he had had with Annette, here in this same park, when he had heard her speak with her mother's voice. He sat down on one of the benches, and breathed the fresh odors of the watered lawns. He felt coming upon him all the passionate hopes which form in the soul of the adolescent the vague groundwork of an infinite romance of love. When he was young he had often known this kind of evening — an evening of wandering fantasy, when he had let his thoughts soar away in imaginary adventures, and he marveled that he felt this return of sensations which were no more of his age.

But just as the persistent note of Schubert's melody had stayed with him, so the thought of Annette, the vision of her fair face and blonde head bent under the lamplight, and the strange suspicions of the Countess clung to him.

In spite of all he could do this subject seemed to occupy his heart, to probe the impenetrable depths where the germs of the human sentiments lie before they are born. This obstinate search troubled him; this constant pre-occupation of the young girl seemed to open in his heart a route of tender reveries; he could not banish them from his memory; he carried with him a sort of evocation of her, like in the days that had passed, when her mother had left him he had kept within the walls of his studio the strange sensation of her presence.

He became impatient with this dominating remembrance. He got up from his seat and shook himself.

"Any was stupid to tell me that," he muttered. "I can think of nothing but the child now."

He went to his home feeling strangely uneasy. He laid awake in his bed; the sleep that he sought would not come to him, for the fever ran in his veins, the sap of the Dream fermented in his heart. Dreading a sleepless night — one of those nervous, sleepless nights provoked by the agitation of the soul — he thought he would take a book and read. Many times a little reading served him as a narcotic. So he got out of bed and went to the book-case to choose a good and soporific work. But his mind was wide awake and in spite of himself eager with a keen emotion, and he looked on the rows of books for the name of a writer who could respond to his state of exultation and hope.

Olivier adored Balzac, but he was useless now; he turned in disdain from Hugo; he looked contemptuously at Lamartine, who, however, always moved him strongly, and then he fell eagerly on Musset, the poet of the young. He took a volume and carried it to bed

with him. At first he began to read snatches here and there, then he drank in with the thirst of a drunkard the verses of one inspired, who, like a bird singing of the dawn of life and only having breath for the morning song, is quieted before the brutal day has come.

He read greedily these verses of a poet who was above all a man intoxicated with life, who threw off his emotions in flourishes of sparkling and naïve love, echoes of all the young hearts which were maddened by love and passionate desires.

Never before had Bertin so thoroughly understood the physical charm of these poems, that charm which excites our senses, but scarcely stirs our intelligence. With eyes on the emotional verses he felt again as though he were twenty years of age, all filled with hope and longing, and he read on almost to the end of the book, drunk with a boyish sensuality.

The clock struck three. He was astonished that he had felt no desire for sleep. He got up to put the book back in the book-case and to close the window, but the contact of the fresh night air brought back the old pains, which his seasons at Aix had not cured; they ran through his joints, making him writhe for the moment; it seemed like a recall — like a warning, and he threw the book down on the table with an impatient movement.

"You old fool, go to bed," he murmured. Then he put out his light and retired.

He did not go the next day to see the Countess, and he went so far as to take the energetic resolution of not calling before two days. But no matter what he did, whether trying to paint or taking a walk, or trailing

his melancholy way from house to house, he was everywhere tormented by the incessant thoughts of the two women. Having resolved not to go and see them, he consoled himself with thinking of them, and he let his thoughts and his heart be wrapped up with the remembrance of them. So often in this sort of hallucination with which he soothed his loneliness, the two figures came and drew near together — two different faces as he knew them — they passed one before the other, mingled and blended together making only one face, which seemed a little vague to him, for it was no longer the face of the mother or that of the child — but the face of a woman passionately loved long ago, now and always.

Then he felt a remorse that he had given himself up so wholly to these thoughts. He was standing on the slope of this tenderness which was beginning to be so powerful and dangerous. To escape from it, to be delivered from this sweet dream, he tried to turn his thoughts to all imaginable ideas, towards all subjects of reflection and of possible meditation. Vain effort! All the roads of distraction that he took led him back to the same point, where he met a young, fair face which seemed to lay in ambush waiting for him. It was a vague and inevitable obsession, floating around him, turning round before him and stopping him. He tried to flee from it, but no matter through what by-ways and winding alleys he went, it was there. The confusion of these two beings who had so strangely moved him on the evening of their walk in the park at Roncières stirred his memory, as ceasing to reflect and reason, he evoked them, striving to understand that singular emo-

tion that had stirred his flesh. "*Voyons!*" he muttered, "have I more feeling for Annette than I ought to have?"

Then, ransacking his heart, he felt it burning with affection for a woman quite young, who had all Annette's features, but who was not quite her. And, coward-like, he reassured himself by thinking: "No, I do not love the child, but I am the victim of her resemblance."

All the same, the two days that he had passed at Roncières remained in his thoughts like a source of warm happiness, of intoxication, and the smallest details came back to him one by one, more precise, more delicious than at the hour itself. Then, following the course of these memories, he again saw the lane where they walked when returning from the cemetery, the bunches of flowers the young girl had gathered, and he suddenly remembered that he had promised her a cornflower in sapphires as soon as they returned to Paris.

All his resolutions flew to the winds, and without a struggle he took his hat and went out, stirred by the thought of the pleasure that he was going to give her.

"Madame la Comtesse is out, but Mademoiselle is at home, monsieur," said the Guilleroy footman as he opened the door in answer to his ring.

He felt a quick rush of joy.

"Tell her I should like to speak to her," he said. And when he went into the *salon* it was with soft, stealthy steps, as though he was afraid of being heard.

Annette appeared almost at once.

"*Bonjour, cher maître,*" she said with gravity.

He laughed as he shook hands with her and sat down beside her.

"Guess why I came?" he said.

She thought for a few seconds.

"I cannot," she said, shaking her head.

"To take you and your mother to the jeweler's to choose the cornflower in sapphires that I promised you at Roncières."

Her face beamed with happiness.

"Oh!" she said, "and mama has gone out, but she will be back soon. You will wait for her, won't you?"

"Yes, if she is not too long."

"Oh, what insolence! Too long with me. You treat me as a child."

"No," he said, "not so much as you think."

He felt a great desire to please her, to be gay and witty, like he had been in the most lively days of his youth; one of those instinctive wishes that over-excite all the faculties of seduction, that desire that makes the peacock spread its tail and strut about, and the poet blazon forth his verses. The phrases came to his lips — quick and brilliant — he spoke as he did when at his best.

The *petite,* delighted by this animation, replied with all the archness — with all the future roguery and wit that was beginning to bud in her.

Suddenly, as they were debating a question, he cried out:

"But you have already said that to me many times. I told you . . ."

She burst out laughing. It was the first time he had said "vous" to her.

"*Tiens!*" she said "so it is 'vous' now, you no longer 'tutoyez' me. You take me for mama."

He crimsoned and remained silent a moment, then stammered:

"Your mother has already favored this idea hundreds of times."

But his eloquence died a quick death. He had nothing more to say, and he began to be afraid now; he had an incomprehensible fear of this little girl.

"Here is mama," she said.

She had heard the door of the outer *salon* open, and Olivier, troubled as though he had been found guilty of a fault, explained to Madame de Guilleroy how he had suddenly remembered the promise he had made at Roncières, and how he had come to fetch them both to go to the jeweler's.

"I have a *coupé,*" he said. "I will sit on the bracket seat."

They started and a few minutes later arrived at Montara's. Olivier Bertin had passed all his life in the intimacy, the observation, the study and the affection of women; he had always occupied himself about them and consequently had been obliged to discover their tastes. He knew the fashions as well as they did; he was *au courant* on all matters of dress, and all the small details of their private existence, and so, in a certain measure, he had partaken somewhat of their sensations, and he always experienced, when going into one of these shops, where the charming and delicate accessories of their beauty are displayed, a feeling of pleasure almost equal to what they felt. He was interested in all the little dainty "nothings" with which they adorned themselves. Beautiful stuffs and exquisite laces pleased his eye, the most insignificant elegant bauble held his attention. In the jeweler's shop, when he

looked in the *vitrines,* he felt a sort of religious respect, like before a sanctuary of rich enticements; and the bureau of dark cloth where the goldsmith's skillful fingers turned over the precious stones with their dazzling reflex imposed a certain esteem.

When the Countess and her daughter were seated before this severe piece of furniture, where both of them posed their hands by a natural movement, he indicated what he wanted and they were shown some designs of small flowers. Next the sapphires were laid out for them to choose from. This took a long time. The two women turned them over on the cloth with the tips of their fingers, then took them up carefully, flashed them in the light, and examined them with a keen and careful attention. When they had selected them and put them on one side the emeralds were brought out; they had three to choose for the leaves and a tiny diamond, which was to glitter in the center like a dewdrop.

The joy of giving was making Olivier quite excited. He turned to the Countess and said eagerly:

"Now, you will give me the pleasure of choosing two rings, will you not, Countess?"

"I?"

"Yes. One for you and one for Annette. Let me give you these little gifts as a remembrance of the two days passed at Roncières."

She refused. He insisted. A long discussion followed — a battle of words and arguments, in which he came out the victor, although not without great trouble.

Some rings were brought to them. Some were very rare, in special cases, others were arranged according to the style in large square boxes, where they showed in

lines on the velvet all the fanciful designs of their bezels.

The painter was seated between the two women, and he began with the same eagerness as they to pick up one by one the gold circlets from the thin slits which held them. He handed them to the Countess and her daughter for them to examine, and they made them into two piles, those that were rejected at first sight and those from which they might choose.

The time passed quickly and happily in the fascinating task of selecting — more captivating to women than any other pleasure.

They made comparisons and then got a little excited, and finally the choice of the three judges, after a great deal of hesitation, fell on a little serpent of gold which held a beautiful ruby between its thin mouth and twisted tail.

Olivier got up from his seat radiant with pleasure.

"I will leave you my carriage," he said. "I have some things to attend to, so I am off."

Annette begged her mother to walk home, as the day was so beautiful. The Countess agreed, and having thanked Bertin and wished him good-bye the two women walked off down the street together. They walked along in silence for some time, contentedly happy with the presents they had received; then they began to talk about the lovely jewels they had seen and handled; in their minds there remained a sort of flashing, a kind of jingling and gayety. They walked quickly along the crowded boulevards. It was five o'clock and the crowd had come out to stroll along the *trottoir*.

Several men in a group turned to look at Annette, and murmured as they passed some vague words of admiration.

It was the first time since they had been in mourning, since the sombre garments had brought out so vividly the brilliancy of Annette's beauty, that the Countess had walked out with her in Paris. This sensation of the success of the street, the attention which she excited, these whispered compliments, this little whirl of emotion which a beautiful woman passing by leaves in a crowd of men, tightened the Countess' heart little by little, compressing it under the same painful feeling as the other evening in the *salon,* when they compared the *petite* with her own likeness. Against her own wish and dignity she watched these looks that Annette attracted. She felt them coming from afar. She felt them look at her own face and pass, then suddenly fix on the fair face beside her. She saw in these glances the quick and silent homage to this blossoming youth, to the charm which her freshness attracted, and she thought with a touch of despairing bitterness:

"And I was once as beautiful as Annette, if not more so."

She was seized as at Roncières by an imperious wish to get away from all. She did not want to feel that she was in the brightness of the crowded boulevards in view of all these men who did not look at her. The days were far off, and yet so near, when she sought and called forth a parallel with her daughter. But who to-day among all the people they had seen would think of comparing them. One only had thought of it perhaps, a little while ago at the jeweler's. He! Oh, what suffering!

How could he help being beset by this comparison? How was it possible for him to see them together without thinking and dreaming of the time when she was

so beautiful and youthful and had gone to his home so sure of being loved by him.

"I am not feeling well; we will take a cab, my child," she said to her daughter.

Annette looked at her mother anxiously. "What is it, mother? Tell me," she said quickly, as she drew her mother's arm through hers.

"It is nothing, dear. You know since your grandmama died I have often felt this weakness."

CHAPTER V

FIXED ideas have sometimes the gnawing tenaciousness of an incurable illness. Once they find entrance in a mind they devour it, they do not leave it the freedom of thinking of anything or the ability to take an interest in the smallest thing.

No matter what the Countess did at home or elsewhere, alone or surrounded by her friends, she could not throw off the thought that had seized her when returning home side by side with her daughter.

How could Olivier help comparing them when he saw them together almost every day? He would be obliged to do it in spite of himself; he would be haunted incessantly by the remembrance of what had been. Each time he came she thought at once of this comparison; she read it in his looks, she knew it and commented on it in her head and in her heart, and so she was tortured by the desire to hide herself, never to show herself to him when her daughter was near. She suffered, besides, in every way; she no longer felt that she was at home in her own house. The wounding dispossession that she had felt the evening when all eyes looked

at Annette beside her portrait grew stronger and at times exasperated her.

She reproached herself continually and bitterly for having the secret wish to be free of her daughter, the unavoidable wish to make her leave her home as though she was an embarrassing and tenacious guest, and she worked on almost unconsciously, gripped by the necessity to struggle and fight so as to still keep, in spite of all, the man whom she loved.

She could not hasten Annette's marriage too much, because their recent mourning had forced her to put off the thought of it for a while, and she began to be afraid, with a confused and strong fear, that something might happen that would stop it altogether; and she tried, although almost against her will, to instill into Annette's heart a love for the Marquis. All the diplomatic ruses that for so long she had employed so as to keep Olivier now took a new form — a more delicate, keener and secretive form, and she exerted herself in every way to make the two young people happy when they were together, and she took the utmost precaution that the two men should not meet each other.

On account of the painter's working habits he seldom lunched outside, and as a rule only gave his evenings to his friends; so Madame de Guilleroy often invited the Marquis to luncheon. He would come in after horse-back riding, bringing in with him a sort of fresh breeze of the morning air. He talked to them gayly on the society doings which seemed to float every day on the autumnal awakening of the brilliant and *hippique* Paris in the *allées* of the Bois de Bolougne.

Annette was amused, listening to his lively talk. She liked these days and began to look forward to his com-

ing. He brought with him all the freshness and elegance of the gay world. So, in the course of time, this juvenile intimacy established between them an affectionate companionship. Their passionate love for horses gave them a taste in common and naturally strengthened their friendship. When he left the house both the Count and Countess adroitly sang his praises; they showed up all his good qualities and gave their daughter to understand that it depended solely upon her to marry him if he pleased her.

And besides, Annette had understood very quickly and the Countess had no reason to feel anxious regarding her sentiments. The young girl reasoned frankly, judging it to be quite a simple matter to take such a handsome youth for her husband — one who would give her among other good things what she preferred most of all — a gallop in the Bois every morning beside him on a thoroughbred.

And so one day quite naturally he became her fiancé. They settled their engagement after a handshake and a smile, and then began to talk of their marriage as if it had been decided a long time. Thenceforth the Marquis began to bring her beautiful presents and the Duchess treated her as though she were her daughter.

And so this affair, which was so dear to the heart of the Duchess and M. and Madame de Guilleroy, had been brought about and warmed by a common accord on a little fire of intimacy during the calm hours of the day, for the Marquis had many other social obligations and duties, and he rarely called in the evening. Then it was Olivier's turn. Each week he dined regularly with his friends, and often appeared unexpectedly to take tea with them between ten o'clock and midnight.

As soon as he came in the Countess watched him. She was gnawed by the wish to know what was passing in his heart. He had not a look or a movement that she did not interpret at once, and she was tortured by this thought: "It is impossible that he does not love her, seeing us both one after the other."

He also brought presents. Not a week passed without him bringing two little parcels. One he offered to the mother, the other to the daughter; and as the Countess opened the box, which often contained some precious bauble, she felt a dull pain at her heart. She knew so well how he loved to give presents, his wish to bring something just to give pleasure. He loved to go to the shops and buy something for some one — to find a pretty trinket that would please some one. In the days that had gone the painter had passed through this stage of giving. She had seen him enter her home many times with the same smile, the same gesture, a little parcel in his hand. After a time this fever of giving presents had calmed down; it had stopped gradually, and now it was beginning again. For whom? She did not for a moment delude herself on the matter. It was not for her.

Bertin had become very thin. He seemed always tired. So she knew he was suffering. She compared his ways and behavior with the attitude of the Marquis, whom Annette's beauty and grace was beginning to move also. It was not the same thing. M. de Farandal was fascinated by her and she pleased him, but Olivier loved her. She thought so, at least, during these hours of torment, but during her moments of calm she hoped she had made a mistake.

When she was alone with him she wanted so often to

question him — to beg and implore him to speak and tell her all — to hide nothing from her. She would rather have known and wept under the certitude than to suffer under this doubt and not be able to read his closed heart, where she felt another love was growing.

She clung to this heart more than her life. She had watched over it and warmed and animated it for twelve years; she had felt sure of it, she had hoped definitely that she had acquired, conquered and brought it to subjection by her passionate devotion, and that it would be hers until the end of their days. And now it was escaping her by an inconceivable, horrible and monstrous fatality! It had suddenly closed up, it was guarding a secret. She could no longer penetrate it by a familiar word. She could not gather her love together in a lump and take it to him like to a faithful retreat that was open to her only. Why does one love? What good is love? What use is it for a woman to give herself suddenly without reserve to a man — to give her entire being, her entire life, all that she has in the world? What is the use of this if it escapes you when another face pleases him and in a few days you become almost a stranger?

A stranger! He! Olivier? He spoke to her as he always did, with the same words, the same voice, the same tone, and yet something had come between them, something inexplicable, unseizable, invincible, almost nothing, this almost nothing that can make a veil blow far away when the wind has turned.

He was surely getting farther away — farther away from her, just a little more every day, she could tell when she saw him looking at Annette.

He himself did not now try to look into his own

heart. He could feel now this fermentation of love — this compelling attraction — but he did not wish to understand it; he committed himself to fate — to the unexpected chances of life.

He lived for the evenings he spent with these two women, who were separated by their bereavement from all social life. He never met any one now but the Corbelles and Musadieu at their home. It seemed to him that he was alone with them in the world, and as he no longer saw the Duchess and her nephew, who only visited them in the mornings and afternoons, he wanted to forget them altogether. He was hoping that the marriage had been put off indefinitely.

Annette never spoke of M. de Farandal before him. Was it by a sort of instinctive shyness, or perhaps by one of those secret intuitions of a woman's heart, which makes her have a presentiment of something which she ignores.

The weeks followed the weeks without anything changing this life. The end of the autumn had come, bringing with it the opening of Parliament, which was earlier than usual on account of political rumors. To-day was the opening of the session and M. de Guilleroy was going to take the Duchess, her nephew and Annette with him after luncheon to the Chamber of Deputies. The Countess had decided to stay at home; she felt apart from them all in her ever-growing sorrow.

They had left the table and were taking the coffee in the drawing room. The young people were very gay. The Count was happy at the thought of going back to his parliamentary duties — his only pleasure. He spoke almost with spirit of the present situation and the perplexity of the government; the Marquis,

who was decidedly in love, talked with warmth on the political questions of the day, looking at Annette all the while, and the Duchess was equally happy. She was as pleased to know that her nephew was really in love as she was to learn that the Republic was in distress.

The air of the drawing room was warm with the first concentrated heat of the re-lit *calorifères,* there was a warmth from the curtains, the carpets and the walls, and throughout the room there was the heavy odor of hothouse flowers. There was in this close room, where the coffee also diffused its aroma, something that was distinctly home-like, an air of intimacy and familiarity and of enjoyment, when the door opened and Olivier Bertin stood on the threshold.

He stood there so much amazed that he hesitated to walk in. He was astonished like a husband who has been deceived and looks upon his wife's crime. Confused anger and a powerful emotion suffocated him, and then he knew that his heart had become worm-eaten with love.

All that they had hidden from him and all that he had hidden from himself appeared to him when he saw the Marquis installed in this house as a fiancé. As if awakening from a sleep with a start, he now fathomed all that he did not wish to know and all that they did not dare say. He no longer asked himself why they had hidden from him all these preparations of the marriage. He guessed it, and his eyes hardened as he looked at the Countess, who bent to hide her crimson face. She and he understood each other, but they restrained themselves.

After he sat down there was a silence for a moment; his unexpected entrance seemed to have paralyzed the

scope of their minds. Then the Duchess began to talk, but he replied to her briefly, in a voice that had a strange hard ring — it had suddenly changed. He looked around at these people, who were again talking, and he said to himself: "They have played a trick on me. They shall pay for it."

He wanted the payment above all from the Countess and Annette. It was they whom he accused of this innocent double dealing. Suddenly the Count looked at the clock and exclaimed:

"*Eh! mes amis,* it is time we started or we shall be late." Then, turning to the painter he said:

"We are going to the opening of the Chambers, my wife is the only one who stays at home. Will you come with us?"

"No, thanks," he replied curtly. "Your Parliament doesn't tempt me."

Annette went up to him and said in her roguish manner:

"Oh, do come, *cher maître.* I am sure you will amuse us much more than the deputies."

"No! really. You will enjoy yourselves very well without me."

Seeing that he was not in an amiable mood, she wanted to be nice and tried to persuade him.

"Yes, come, *monsieur le peintre.* I assure you that I, for one, cannot get along without you."

Some words escaped him so quickly that he could not stop them or modify their accent. "Bah! You can get along without me like every one else," he said.

A little surprised at the tone, she exclaimed: "*Allons bon!* Just see, he has commenced not to '*tutoyer*' me."

His lips curled in one of those sarcastic smiles which

show all the badness in one's soul. He made her a slight bow and said:

"I must get into that habit sooner or later."

"And why so?"

"Because you will marry and your husband, whoever he may be, will have the right to consider this 'tutoiement' from me out of place."

"There is time enough to think of that," the Countess hastened to say. "But I hope that Annette will not marry a man so susceptible as to take offense at this familiarity of an old friend."

"Hurry up! Hurry up, you good people. *En route* or we shall be late," cried the Count. And those who were going with him got up and went off with him, after the usual handshakes and kisses that the Duchess, the Countess and her daughter exchanged each time they met and each time they parted.

They were alone, she and he, standing behind the portières of the closed door.

"Sit down, *mon ami,*" she said softly.

"No, thanks. I am going also," he said, almost violently.

She murmured in a supplicating tone:

"Oh! why, Olivier?"

"Because this is not my hour, so it appears, and I must ask your pardon for calling without informing you."

"Olivier, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, only I regret that I disturbed a party of pleasure that had been organized."

She grasped his hands.

"What is it you wish to say? They were just leaving when you came. As you see, they have gone to attend

the opening of the session. I stayed. You have been, on the contrary, quite inspired in coming this afternoon, for I am alone."

He sneered.

"Inspired! Yes, very much inspired."

She took his wrists and held them tight as she looked in the depths of his eyes. Then she said in a low, thick voice:

"Confess to me, Olivier, that you love her."

He pulled his hand away, unable to master his impatience.

"You are mad with that idea!"

She grasped his arm; holding his sleeve with trembling fingers, she said beseechingly:

"Olivier, tell me! Please tell me! I want to know, although I am certain, but I want to *know*. I *must* know. Oh! you don't know what my life has become."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you want me to do? Is it my fault if you have lost your head?"

She held him and drew him on into the other room — the room at the end, where they could not be heard. She pulled him by the sleeve, clinging to him and gasping. When she had drawn him as far as the little round sofa she forced him to sit down and then sat down beside him.

"Olivier, *mon ami,* my only friend. I implore you, tell me that you love her. *I know it.* I feel it in everything that you do. I cannot doubt it, and it is killing me. But I must hear it from your own lips."

As he still argued she dropped on her knees at his feet. Her voice shook.

"Oh, *mon ami,* my friend, my only friend. Is it true that you love my daughter? Only tell me."

He tried to raise her.

"No! no! Any. I swear to you I do not," he cried.

She got up suddenly and put her hand over his mouth and closed it.

"Do not lie to me, Olivier," she said. "I am suffering too much."

Then, letting her head fall on his knees, she sobbed.

He could only see the nape of her neck, with its coil of blonde hair, thickly streaked with silver, and he was seized with an immense pity, a great sadness came upon him as he looked down at her.

He took her heavy head of hair in his two hands and turned it quickly, almost violently raising her streaming eyes to him. He pressed his lips again and again on the blue eyes full of tears; each time he repeated softly, "Any, Any, dear Any."

She tried to smile and spoke in the hesitating, choked voice of a child when grief suffocates it.

"Oh, *mon ami,* only tell me that you love me just a little. Me."

He kissed her again and again.

"Yes, I do love you, Any dear."

She sat down beside him on the sofa and took his hands and stroked them tenderly. "We have loved each other for so long, it ought not to finish now," she said, wistfully.

He drew her closer to him.

"Why should it finish?" he asked.

"Because I am old and Annette is just like what I was when you first loved me."

Letting her head fall on his knees, she sobbed.

This time it was he who closed her sad mouth with his hand.

"Again I beg of you, do not speak of that any more. I swear to you that you have made a mistake."

"If only you can love me a little, just a little, me," she repeated.

"Yes, I do love you, Any," he said.

They sat for a long time, holding each other's hands, very moved and very sad. She was the first to break the silence.

"Ah! *mon ami,* the hours that remain for me to live will not be gay," she said.

"I will try to make them happy," he answered.

The shades of the cloudy sky which comes before twilight fell over the room, shrouding them little by little under the gray dim light of the autumn evening.

The clock struck.

"We have been here a long time," she said. "You must go, for they may return at any moment, and neither of us is calm."

He got up and strained her to him and kissed her as before on her half open mouth, then they walked back across the large room silently, with their arms linked together.

"*Adieu, mon ami,*" she said.

"*Adieu, mon amie,*" he answered.

And the heavy portière fell behind him. He walked down the staircase and into the street, turning towards the Madeleine. He walked on without knowing what he was doing. He was dazed like after a blow, his knees tottered, his heart was warm and palpitating, as though a burning compress had been placed on his chest.

For two or three hours he continued his walk in a sort of moral besottedness and physical depression, which left him just enough strength to put one foot before the other. Then he went home to think and to go over the happenings of the past weeks.

It was true, then, he did love the child. He understood now all that he had felt when near her, since their first walk in the Parc Monceau, when he heard in her voice the appeal of another voice scarcely recognized — a voice which once had stirred his heart. Then there had been this slow, irresistible, recommencing of a love that had not burnt out, that had not yet grown cold, which he obstinately would not avow.

What should he do? Or, what could he do? When she was married he would shun her as much as possible, that was all. Meanwhile he would continue going to the house, so that no one should suspect, and he would hide his secret from them all.

He dined at home, a thing he had never done before; then he had the great stove in the studio lit, for the night was chilly. He ordered them to light the large candelabra, as though he feared the dark corners. Then he closed himself in his room. What a strange emotion gripped him! It was deep, physical and terribly sad. He felt it in his throat, his chest, in all his muscles, as much as he felt it in his weak soul. The walls of his room oppressed him. How many years of his life had been passed here, his life of an artist and his man's life. Each painted study hanging upon the walls recalled a triumph, each piece of furniture was a remembrance. But triumphs and remembrances were things that had passed. His life — how short and empty, and all for self it had been. He had made

some pictures, then more pictures, always pictures, and loved one woman.

He recalled the nights of exaltation that he had passed after their *rendez-vous* in this same room. How he had walked up and down all night long with his whole being quivering with passion! The joy of a happy love, then the joy of worldly success, the unique intoxication of glory, had made him relish some hours that could never be forgotten — hours of intimate triumph.

He had loved a woman, and this woman had loved him. From her he had received the baptism which reveals to a man the mysterious world of emotion and tender sentiment. She had opened his heart almost by force, and now he could not close it to her. Another love had entered in spite of him by this same gap, another, or rather, the same, re-warmed by a new face — a sprig produced from the roots, which as it grows takes the strength.

Then it was true, he did love the child. He need no longer struggle, resist, or lie, he loved her with the hopelessness of knowing that he would not even have so much as a little pity from her — that she would always be ignorant of his atrocious torment, and another would marry her.

This thought that she would belong to another returned to him again and again; it was impossible for him to banish it. He was seized with an animal wish to howl and gnash his teeth in the manner of chained beasts, for he felt powerless, subdued, and chained like them. He became more and more unnerved, the more he thought of it; he walked with great strides across the vast studio, lit as brilliantly as though for a *fête*.

At last, not able to tolerate longer this thought, he tried to calm himself by thinking of his old tenderness; he wanted to drown his mad love for the child by bringing up again his first great passion. He went to the closet, where he kept the copy that he had made for himself of the portrait of the Countess. He took it and placed it on his easel, then sat opposite with folded arms and looked at it. He tried to see her again as she used to be, to think of her as she used to sit for her portrait, just as when he first loved her. But it was always Annette's face that rose up on the canvas. The mother's face disappeared, fading gently away and leaving in its place this other face which was so strangely like hers. It was the *petite*, with her hair a little lighter, her smile a little more arch, her expression a little more mocking, and then he knew that he belonged body and soul to the child as he had never belonged to the mother — he belonged to her like a ship which sinks belongs to the sea.

He got up and turned the painting with the face to the wall so as not to see the apparition. Then he went to his room to fetch from the drawer of his writing-desk all the letters he had had from his mistress.

They lay there in their sleeping place as on a bed, one above the other, making a thick layer of little thin papers. He thrust his hand inside — into all this prose which spoke of them both — of their love — into this bath of their long *liaison*. He looked at this straight, narrow coffin of boards where the mass of envelopes lay, a heap of them, with his name on every one — his name only — always his name.

He thought of the love, of the tender attachment of

two beings the one for the other, the story of two hearts that was told in this yellow pile of papers sealed with the crimson wax, and as he bent over them he inhaled an old breath, that melancholy odor of old letters that have been closed up.

He wanted to read them again, and rummaging to the bottom of the drawer he took out a handful of the earliest. As he read them, old memories dropped out, clear and precise, which moved his very soul. He remembered that many of them he had carried about in his pocket for weeks at a time, and he found through all the small writing which told him such soft, sweet things, the forgotten emotion of old. Then in one of the envelopes he came across a fine embroidered handkerchief. What was it? He thought for a few moments and then remembered. One day, when here in this room with him, she had sobbed because she was a little jealous, and then he had stolen her lace handkerchief soaked with her tears. Poor Any! Poor woman! How sad it was!

From the bottom of the drawer — from the depths of his past — all these memories rose up like a vapor; it was only the impalpable vapor of the dried up reality, but he suffered and cried over these letters as we cry over our dead because they are no more.

But all the stirring of this old love caused within him a young and new ardor, a sap of irresistible tenderness, and Annette's radiant face came back to haunt him.

He had loved the mother in a passionate flight of voluntary servitude; he commenced to love the child as a slave, like an old trembling slave to whom one rivets chains he will never be able to break. He felt it in the depths of his soul, and he was terrified. He tried to

understand how and why she enslaved him like this. He knew her so little. She was scarcely a woman — her heart and her soul still slept the sleep of youth. And he was now almost at the end of his life. How then had this child been able to bind him — just with the tendrils of her blonde hair and a few smiles. Ah! the smiles and the hair of this little fair girl!

Does one know, will one *ever* know, why the face of a woman can suddenly exercise this great power on a man, the power of a poison? It seems that one drinks her in with the eyes, for she becomes one's thought and one's flesh. One gets drunk with it, maddened with it; one lives in this rapt image and wants to die in it. How one suffers sometimes from this fierce and incomprehensible power, this power of a form, of a face on the heart of a man.

Olivier Bertin began to walk the room again. The night was falling; the fire had died out. Through the clinks of the shutters the cold from outside came to him. After a while he went to bed, where until daybreak he thought and suffered.

He was up at an early hour without knowing why or what he was going to do. His excited nerves made him vacillate like a weathercock as it turns. He wanted mental distraction and physical occupation, and he remembered that this was the day when several members of his club met each week at the Bain Maure, where they had *déjeuner* after the massage. So he dressed quickly, hoping that the vapor rooms and the shower would calm him, and he went out.

As soon as he got outside a sharp chill gripped him; the crisp shivering cold of the first frost which destroys in a single night all that remains of summer. On the

boulevard there was a thick shower of large yellow leaves, as they fell from the trees, with a dry crackling sound. One could see them falling as far as the eye could reach, from one end to the other of the wide avenue, between the façades of the houses, as if all the stalks with one movement had been separated from the branches by the cutting of a fine blade of ice. The roads and the sidewalks were already covered and for some hours had looked like a road in a forest at the beginning of winter. The dead yellow foliage crackled under the footsteps as the wind blew it together in little light heaps. It was one of those days of transition which come at the end of one season and the beginning of another, and which give us either a feeling of joy or of sadness — sadness for what has passed away, or enjoyment for the energy which is re-born.

It was with a feeling of satisfaction that Olivier entered the building of the Bain Maure. After his cold walk in the frosty air the thought of the heat that would soon penetrate his chilled flesh stirred in him a degree of pleasure.

He undressed slowly and rolled around his loins the light scarf that an attendant handed him and then disappeared through the padded doors that swung open to him. A warm, oppressive air, which seemed to come from a distant fire, made him breathe deeply as if he had been deprived of air as he crossed the moresque gallery lighted by two oriental lamps.

Then a woolly attendant, with shining torso and brawny muscles, wearing only a belt around his waist, rushed before him to lift up the portières at the other extremity, and Bertin went in the great round, silent room, which seemed almost as mysterious as a temple.

The daylight streamed in from above, through the cupola and from the trefoil of colored glass in the immense circular hall, with its flagstone paving and walls covered with decorated faience in the Arabian style.

Men of all ages, almost naked, slowly walked about with grave, sedate steps, without speaking; others were seated on marble benches, their arms folded across their chests; others talked in low voices. The hot air made one gasp from the entry. There was something of the antique and mysterious in this stifling and decorated hall, where the human flesh was warmed and the body massaged by colored and Moorish masseurs.

The first face that the painter recognized was that of the Comte de Landa, who was walking round the *salle* like a Roman wrestler, proud of his enormous chest, and his great arms crossed over it. He was an *habitué* of the vapor rooms and felt, when on the scene, like an applauded actor, and he judged as an expert the discussed muscularity of all the strong men of Paris.

"*Bonjour,* Bertin," he called out.

They shook hands, then Landa said:

"*Hein!* good time for the sudation."

"Yes, splendid."

"Have you seen Rocdiane? He is over there. I had to go and pull him out of bed to get him here. Oh, just look at that anatomy! My!"

A little man passed them, shambling along on two knock-kneed legs. His chest was narrow and his arms painfully scraggy and the two old models of health and strength smiled disdainfully as he went by.

Rocdiane, who had just noticed Bertin, came towards them. They all three sat down on a long slab of marble and began to talk as though they were in a drawing-

room. The *garçons* moved about carrying trays of drinks. One could hear the flagellation that the masseurs were giving to the naked flesh and the sudden splash of the shower. An incessant rippling of water coming from all corners of the great amphitheater fell with the sound of a light rain.

Every minute a newcomer nodded to the two friends or came up and shook hands with them. There was the big Duc d'Harisson, the little Prince Epilati, Baron Flach and many others.

"*Tiens!* there's Farandal," cried Rocdiane suddenly.

The Marquis came into the *salle,* his hands on his hips, walking with the ease of a man who is exceptionally well proportioned and fears no comments.

"Ah, that youth is a young gladiator," murmured Landa, admiringly.

Rocdiane turned to Bertin.

"Is it true that he is going to marry your friends' — the Guilleroys'— daughter?"

"I believe so," said the painter.

But this question, in this place, with the Marquis standing before him showing his splendid physique, sent an awful shock of hopelessness and revolt to Olivier's heart. The horrors of it all — this boy with the perfect form was to be *her* husband. Maddening thoughts rushed upon him with such force that for some seconds he struggled with the animal wish to spring upon the Marquis and grapple with him.

He got up.

"I am tired," he said to his friends. "I am going at once to have massage."

An Arab passed.

"*Ahmed, es-tu libre?*" he said to the man.

"*Oui, Monsieur Bertin.*"

And he passed out with hurried footsteps so as to avoid shaking hands with Farandal, who came up slowly in making the tour of the Hammam.

He stayed scarcely a quarter of an hour in the large reposing room. The room was delightfully cool and peaceful, the circle of alcoves with their beds was round a garden of African plants, with fountains playing in the center.

Bertin was afraid that the Marquis might join him and that he would have to take his outstretched hand and treat him as a friend, when all the time he felt he would like to kill him.

He was soon back again on the boulevards covered with their dead leaves. They had finished falling, the last ones had dropped through a heavy gust of wind. Their red and yellow carpet moved and blew away in bits — here and there — flying from one sidewalk to the other, as the high wind got stronger. Suddenly a sort of hissing, moaning noise stole over the roof-tops, the cry of the tempest as it passes, and at the same time a violent wind which seemed to come from beyond the Madeleine blew over the boulevards.

All the leaves that had fallen seemed to have been waiting for it. At its approach they raked together in little heaps, and as it came upon them they blew whirling and rising in spirals up to the coping of the houses. The strong wind chased them like a flock — a maddened flock flying away; on they went wildly towards the outskirts of Paris — towards the free, beautiful blue sky of the country. When the big clouds of leaves and dust had disappeared beyond the high ground of the *quartier*

Malesherbes the roads and the pavements were bare, miraculously cleaned and swept.

Bertin walked on, wondering what he should do. "What's to be done next?" he asked himself wearily, and then he turned towards his home, at a loss to know how to kill time.

A *kiosque* of newspapers attracted his eye; he bought seven or eight, hoping that he might find something to read for an hour or two.

"I shall have luncheon here," he said to his man as he went up to his studio. All thought of rest was out of the question; since he had seen Farandal he felt like an enraged beast. He sat down and scanned the newspapers, but could find nothing to hold his attention; the facts that he read stayed in his eyes without getting as far as his thoughts. In the middle of an article that he did not try to understand the word Guilleroy caught his eye and made him tremble. It was only about the opening of Parliament, where the Count had spoken a few words.

His attention, now a little more awake, was arrested by the name of the celebrated tenor Montrosé, who was going to give a single night performance at the Opéra, towards the end of December. It was as the newspapers explained a magnificent musical solemnity. The tenor Montrosé, who had been away from Paris for ten years, had returned, after making a tour in America and throughout Europe; his success in all the cities was without precedent. He would be accompanied by the renowned Swedish singer, Helsson. She also had not been heard in Paris for five years. Olivier at once felt he would like to give Annette the pleasure of hearing

this performance. Then he remembered that their mourning would be an obstacle in the way, and he thought out the means so that it might be arranged all the same. Only one presented itself — if he could manage to get a stage box they would scarcely be seen, and then if the Countess still objected, Annette could be chaperoned by the Duchess. In that case he would have to offer the box to the Duchess; then he would have to invite her nephew. Bah! He hesitated and thought it over for a long time.

There was no doubt the marriage was quite decided and probably the date already fixed. He could imagine how his friend would hasten to bring it about; he knew that in the shortest time possible she would give her daughter to Farandal. He could do nothing. He could neither stop, modify, nor retard this awful thing. So, as he was obliged to submit to it, would it not be better to overcome his passion and hide his suffering and appear contented and never be carried off again by his jealous feelings? Yes, it was decided. He would invite the Marquis and in that way quell the suspicions that the Countess had, and he would keep on a friendly footing in the future home of the young couple.

As soon as he had lunched he went to the Opera House to make sure that he would be able to get one of the boxes that were hidden behind the curtains. It was reserved for him; then he hurried to the Guilleroys. The Countess appeared almost immediately; she was still much affected by their reconciliation of the night before.

"How good it is of you to come again to-day," she said.

"I have brought you something," he stammered.

"What is it?"

"A stage box at the opera for a one night performance of Helsson and Montrosé."

"Oh, *mon ami,* I cannot. What a pity. I am so sorry, but you know my mourning."

"You have been in black for almost four months now," he said.

"Oh! it would be impossible for us to go."

"And Annette; think! an occasion like this may never come again."

"Who would take her?"

"Her father and the Duchess, whom I am going to invite. I shall also offer a place to the Marquis."

She looked straight into his eyes and a foolish wish to put her arms round his neck and kiss him came to her. But she only repeated, scarcely believing her ears:

"The Marquis!"

"Yes, the Marquis. Why not?"

And at once she consented to this arrangement.

"Have you fixed the date of their marriage?" he asked carelessly.

"*Mon Dieu!* Yes, practically. We all want to hurry it now as much as possible. It was already decided before mother's death, you remember?"

"Yes, perfectly. So when is it?"

"The early part of January. You will pardon me, *mon ami,* for not having mentioned it to you sooner."

At this moment Annette came into the room. He caught his breath between his teeth and his heart beat violently. Then all the tenderness that he felt for her suddenly became embittered; it was that passionate ani-

mosity that love becomes when it is lashed by jealousy.

"I have brought you something," he said to her.

"Then we are most decidedly at 'vous,'" she said, as again he did not "tutoyer" her.

"Listen, my child," he said, adopting a parental air. "I know all about the important event that is to take place shortly, and then, I assure you, I shall have to be more formal with you, so it is better to begin too soon than too late."

She shrugged her shoulders, not at all pleased, while the Countess remained silent, with her eyes and thoughts seemingly far away.

"What is it you have brought me?" Annette asked.

He told her of the production at the Opera and that he had seats for them all.

She was delighted and sprang on his neck like a child, kissing him quickly on both cheeks.

For a moment his strength seemed to go from him; as he felt the two light kisses on his face coming from her little mouth with its sweet fresh breath he knew that he would never be cured of his love.

The Countess shivered.

"Your father is waiting for you, Annette," she said.

"Yes, mama, I am going."

She ran off, throwing him a kiss as she went.

As soon as she had gone Olivier said abruptly:

"Are they going to travel?"

"Yes, for two or three months."

And he murmured in spite of himself:

"So much the better."

"We will take up our old life again," said the Countess.

"Yes, I hope so," he stammered.

"In the meantime do not neglect me again, Olivier."

"No, *mon amie.*"

The outburst of feeling that he had shown the day before when seeing her cry and the idea that he had had in inviting the Marquis to his box at the Opera had given a little hope to the Countess.

But it was short lived.

A week had not passed before she saw again with a torturing and jealous attention that he was passing through moments of the deepest anguish.

It was impossible for her to ignore it. Was she not herself going through all this grief that she felt he was suffering, and the constant presence of Annette made her see every moment of the day that all her efforts were useless. Everything seemed to crush her down at the same time — her years, her mourning, her sorrow. Her lively coquetry, so skillful and ingenious, which had made her triumph for him during all these years, was paralyzed by the sombre black garments which seemed to increase her pallor and the alteration of her features as much as it brought out the brilliant adolescence of her child.

The time seemed already far off, and yet it was such a little while ago, when she chose with pride a similarity in their dresses, which was so becoming to her. Now she had a mad desire to tear off the sombre black garments that made her look so much older and plainer.

If she could again have at her command all the resources of *chic* elegance, she could choose and wear beautiful silky materials in the softest shades that would harmonize with her complexion and give to her fading

charms a studied power just as attractive as her daughter's inert grace. Without a doubt she would still have been able to look the more attractive.

She knew so well the effect of beautiful gowns. She knew what delicate evening dresses and soft sensual morning négligés could achieve; the charming boudoir gowns that can be worn for luncheon with one's most intimate friends and which envelope a woman in a sort of *saveur* of her awakening, the material and warm impression of her bed and the perfumed atmosphere she has left. But how could she tempt one in a sepulchral garment, a sort of convict's uniform that she was to wear for a year? For one year she was to be imprisoned in this awful black! *Quelle horreur!* For one year she would feel herself getting older, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, under this sheath of black.

She would be depressed and inactive for a whole year! What would she be like at the end of the term if her poor sick flesh continued to alter so, on account of all the suffering she was going through?

This idea never left her; it spoiled everything she might have enjoyed and made a burden of the things that should have been a joy, not leaving her one pleasure intact, or a contentment, or a gayety.

Without ceasing she rebelled and trembled with the exasperating wish to shake off this weight of misery which was crushing her, for without this harassing thought she would have still been so happy, lively and well.

She felt that her soul was perennial and fresh, her heart always young, that her passion was only beginning to live, that she had an insatiable appetite for

happiness and love — more eager than in her youth was this devouring wish to love.

And here were all the good things — all the sweet, delightful, poetic things which make our lives so beautiful and dear to us drawn away from her because she was getting old. It was finished! And yet all the time she had the feelings of a young girl and the passionate emotions of a young woman. Nothing had gotten old but her flesh — her miserable skin — this stuff over her bones, which was fading little by little — fading and wearing like a cloth that covers a piece of furniture. She seemed to be haunted by this decadence of her beauty; these morbid ideas fastened to her and became almost a physical torment, and by degrees she began to experience a sensation of the epidermis, a sensation of aging, just the same as she might feel the heat or the cold. In short, she seemed to feel a vague moving process on her face, the slow on-coming of the lines as they crossed her forehead, the sinking in of the tissues of the cheeks and the throat, and the multiplying of the innumerable little ravages which in time devour our skins.

Just like a person who is stricken with a devouring disease whom a constant prudence compels to scratch himself — the perception and the terror of this slow abominable work that was destroying her beauty, impelled her with a powerful and irresistible craving to verify it continually in the mirror. She would gaze at her face with fixed eyes, then she would touch it here and there with her finger, as if to be better assured of the ineffaceable wear and tear of the years. The *crave* to look in the mirror was growing steadily. At first it was an intermittent thought which reappeared

each time that she passed a glass in her own home or elsewhere. Then it took another form; she began to stop on the pavement, pretending to look in the shops, but all the time she would be gazing into the looking glasses at the back, which the shopkeepers use to ornament their windows.

It became a mania — an incessant occupation. In her pocket she carried a tiny ivory box of rice powder about as big as a nut; the interior lid closed with a spring and held a hidden mirror, and often while walking along she would hold it open in her hand and then raise it to her eyes.

When she tried to read or write in the tapestried drawing-room her mind, which for a moment was upon her work, would leave it and come back to the thought that haunted her.

She struggled and tried hard to take an interest in other things. She fought with this desire which continually interrupted her work. But it was in vain. The prick of this desire tormented her and soon her hand would leave the book or the pen and stretch out by an irresistible movement towards the hand-mirror in old silver which lay on her desk.

In the chased oval frame her face looked out at her — it was like a face that had been — like an old portrait — a pastel that was once fresh and now faded by the sun. Then, when she had looked at it for a long time, she would put the little object back with a weary movement and go on with her work, but she would not read two pages or write twenty lines before the craving would come to look at herself — invincible and torturing — and she would stretch out her hand again to take the mirror. She handled it now as

if it was a familiar and annoying bauble that the hand could not leave, using it at all moments, even when receiving her friends. She hated it as though it were a being, but she kept it with her always.

One day, exasperated by this struggle between herself and the cruel piece of glass, she threw it in a frenzy up against the wall and smashed it to atoms. A few days later her husband brought it to her repaired. He had had a new glass put into the beautiful chased frame, a glass that was finer than the old one, and wonderfully clear.

She had to take it and thank him and she resigned herself to keeping it. Each morning and each evening she closed herself in her room and, although against her will, she made a minute and patient examination of the odious and ceaseless havoc.

When in bed she could not sleep. She would light a candle and remain with eyes wide open, thinking that insomnia and grief were irremediably hastening the work of Time which was passing onward so rapidly. In the silence of the night she listened to the ticking of the clock, which seemed to whisper with its monotonous tic-tac, "Time passes," "time passes," "time passes." Her heart shivered in anguish and moaned in despair. Until now she had felt, but in the same manner that every one feels, the changes that the years bring. Like us all, she found that each springtime or each summer she had altered a little. "I have changed since last year," she would remark lightly. But as she remained still beautiful, a slight alteration of her beauty did not worry her. Now, to-day, instead of verifying this slow march of the seasons, she saw and studied the formidable flight of the days. She now

had a full revelation of this slipping away of the hours, of this imperceptible march of Time, which is maddening when we think of the infinite filing off of the little hurried seconds which are gnawing at the bodies and the lives of us all.

After the long, miserable night, when her maid had thrown back the curtains and made the morning fire blaze in the chimney, she was able to fall into a more tranquil somnolence; fatigued and drowsy, neither asleep nor awake, she would lie in a torpor of thought, raising up again the instinctive and prayerful hope that she would still live until her last days in the heart and the smiles of the man she loved.

Each morning now as soon as she left her bed she felt dominated by a powerful desire to pray to God, to get a little solace and comfort from Him.

She knelt before the large Christ in carved oak that Olivier had given her for a present — a rare piece of work that he had discovered. With closed lips — with the silent voice of the soul with which one speaks to one's self — she sent an appealing supplication to the Divine Martyr. Desperate, by the need of being heard and helped, naïve in her distress like all the faithful at prayer, she did not doubt that He listened to her, that He was attentive to her request and perhaps touched by her trouble. She did not ask Him to do for her what He had not done for others, to leave with her all her life the charm, the freshness and grace. She asked Him only for a little rest — a respite. She knew she had to get old the same as she knew she had to die. But why so quickly? Some women remained beautiful so long, would he let her be one of those? How good it would be! He who had suffered so much Himself,

if He would let her have only for two or three years more the solace of the charm that she needed to be able to please!

She did not say this in words, but she moaned it to Him in the confused plaint of her heart.

Then, rising from her knees, she sat before her dressing table and with intense application of mind, as ardent as that she had had for her prayer, she handled the powders, pastes and pencils, the puffs and the brushes that made daily her frail beauty — her patched up, painted beauty.

CHAPTER VI

ON the boulevards one heard two names in every one's mouth — Emma Helsson and Montrosé. The nearer one got to the Opéra the more one heard them repeated. Besides, large posters were stuck on the Morris columns showing the celebrated names to all who went by. A crowd of people was standing before the great building that one calls the *Académie Nationale de Musique,* which loomed out brilliantly against the dark sky. Invisible focuses of electric light lit up like a magnificent decoration the stately white façade and the marble colonnade of its gallery.

On the square the Republican Guards on horseback directed the general traffic and the innumerable carriages which were arriving from all quarters of Paris.

Behind the lowered windows of the carriages one could see fair faces and exquisite gowns. The *coupés* and landaus were drawn up in line in the reserved arcades and the *mondaines*, and other precious creatures

divinely decked out in elaborate cloaks trimmed with furs, feathers and priceless lace stepped out and walked up the steps into the marble hall. Up the world-renowned staircase it was like an ascension of fairies, an unbroken line of women dressed like queens, with diamonds flashing from their ears, throats and corsages and their long embroidered trains trailing behind them on the stairs.

The house filled quickly; no one wanted to lose a note of the celebrated singers. Throughout the vast amphitheater, under the dazzling lights falling from the crystal chandeliers, a surge of people were taking their seats amid a confused murmur of voices.

From the stage box, which was already occupied by the Duchess, Annette, the Count, the Marquis, Bertin and M. de Musadieu, one could only see behind the scenes, where groups of men were talking, others running to and fro giving orders; there were machinists in working blouses, gentlemen in evening suits and actors in stage costume. But behind the immense lowered curtain one could hear the deep murmur of the crowd and feel the presence of a multitude of moving and excited beings.

They were going to play Faust.

Musadieu elated some incidents on the first representation of this opera which had been held at the Lyric Theater. He told them how, at the beginning of the piece, they almost had a breakdown and then scored a magnificent triumph; about the actors and their style of rendering each piece. Annette, who had half turned towards him, listened with that eager and girlish curiosity that she seemed to bring into everything. Now and again she would give the man beside her, who

was to be her husband within a few days, a look full of tenderness.

She loved him now like a young heart can love, that is to say, she loved in him all her future hopes. The intoxication of the first gaieties of life and the fervent wish to be happy in her marriage made her tremble with gladness and expectation.

And Olivier, who saw all, and who knew all, who had gone down into all the degrees of secret love powerless and jealous, down to the depths of human suffering, where the heart seems to crackle like flesh on hot coals, remained standing in the rear of the box. He looked at them both with the look of a criminal who is going to be executed.

The performance was going to commence. The three knocks were given, then a little sharp tapping of the bow on the conductor's desk, then all movements, coughs and voices stopped suddenly. After a short and profound silence the first notes of the introduction started, filling the house with the invisible and irresistible mystery of the music, which pours out into the body, maddening the nerves and the soul with a poetic and material excitement, mingling the limpid air that one seems to breathe with it, with the deep wave of glorious notes that one listens to.

Olivier, sitting in the rear of the box, was painfully affected; it seemed as if the wounds of his heart had been touched by these chords.

As the curtain went up he pulled himself together and looked out at the scene, representing the laboratory of the alchemist, Doctor Faust, who was sitting in a chair meditating. He had already seen this opera twenty times and knew it almost by heart, so his atten-

tion left it at once and began to wander round the house. He had discovered a little angle back of the framework of the box, where he could see quite a portion of the audience. He had already recognized many acquaintances in the orchestra stalls, the men in white cravats sitting in a line side by side, it was like an exhibition of familiar faces — club men, artists, journalists, all the categories of those who never miss going where everybody goes. In the boxes on the balcony he saw several women he knew. The Comtesse de Lochrist, looking adorable, was in a box opposite the stage, while a little farther along he recognized a newly married *élégante,* the Marquise d'Ebelin. The men were already turning their opera glasses to look at her. "A brilliant beginning," thought Bertin. Every one was listening with great attention and evident sympathy to the tenor, Montrosé, who was lamenting on life.

"What humbug," thought Olivier. "Here is Faust, the mysterious and sublime Faust, who sings about the horrible disgust and the nothingness of it all, and this crowd is asking with anxiety if Montrosé's voice has not changed."

Then he listened like the others and behind the commonplace words the actor was singing, across the music which awakens in the depths of the soul some profound perceptions, he had a sort of revelation of the manner in which Goethe dreamed of the heart of Faust.

A long time ago he had read the poem, which he thought very beautiful, but he had never been very much affected by it, and now suddenly he felt the unfathomable depth, for it seemed to him that this evening he himself had become a Faust. Leaning forward

a little over the ridge of the box, Annette was listening with all attention.

Some murmurs of satisfaction began to pass through the house, for Montrosé's voice was in better condition and richer than it had been ten years ago.

Bertin sat with closed eyes. For the last month everything that he saw and felt and everything that came into his life, he immediately made a sort of accessory to his love. All that he saw that was beautiful and rare — all that he could imagine that was charming, he at once mentally offered it to his little friend, and he had not an idea that could not in some way recall and coincide with his love. Now from the bottom of his heart he echoed the lamentations of Faust and the desire for death surged up in him, the desire that he also should finish with his griefs, with all the misery of his love that was without hope. He looked at Annette's delicate profile and then at the Marquis de Farandal, who was sitting behind her, and also gazing at her. He felt old, finished, lost! Ah! nothing to wait for, nothing to hope for, to hardly have the right to desire love. *He was old!* He was out of the running, at the retreat of life, like an old officer whose career is terminated. What intolerable torture!

The applause burst out. Montrosé had triumphed already and Méphistophèles-Labarrière arose from the ground.

Olivier, who had never heard him in this rôle, turned his attention to the stage again. His remembrance of Aubin, who was so dramatic with his bass voice, and the captivating Faure, with his baritone, diverted his thoughts for some moments. But suddenly a line that

Montrosé sang with irresistible rendering moved him strangely. Faust said to Satan:

Je veux un trésor qui les contient tous,
Je veux la jennesse.

And the tenor appeared in silk doublet with sword hanging at the side, a toque of plumes on his head, a distinguished, young and handsome man, with the affected air of a singer.

A murmur ran through the house. He had a splendid physique and naturally pleased the women, but Olivier was disappointed, for the acute evocation of the dramatic poem by Goethe vanished in this transformation. From now on the play seemed to him some pretty scenes, full of nice music, some talented actors with good voices. This handsome young man in a doublet, with a stiff ruffled collar, who showed his thighs, displeased him. It was not the real thing, it was not the irresistible and sinister Chevalier Faust — he who was going to seduce Marguerite. He sat back in his seat and the phrase that he had just heard came back to him:

Je veux un trésor qui les contient tous,
Je veux la jeunesse.[1]

He murmured it between his teeth, sang it sorrowfully in the depths of his soul, and with eyes always looking at the creamy nape of Annette's neck, which showed up as she leaned over the square bay of the box, he felt in himself all the bitterness of his passion that could never be realized.

Montrosé was finishing the first act with such perfect rendering that the enthusiasm of the multitude burst

[1] I desire a treasure that contains them all,
I desire youth.

forth. For several minutes the deafening applause, the stamping of feet, the clapping of hands, the shouts, the bravos, roared through the vast playhouse like a storm. In the boxes one could see the women beating their gloved hands together, while their escorts, standing behind, cheered and shouted their bravos.

The curtain fell and rose up twice without the enthusiasm abating. Then when it went down for the third time, separating the public from the stage and the interior boxes, the Duchess and Annette still continued to applaud for a few moments, and were specially thanked by a ceremonious bow that the tenor made to them.

"Oh, he looked at us!" cried Annette.

"He is splendid — simply superb," exclaimed the Duchess.

And Bertin, who had come forward and was leaning over, looked with a mingled sentiment of irritation and disdain at the cheered actor, who was disappearing between two doors, waddling a little, with his leg stiff, the sword dangling at the side, his hands on his hips in the studied pose of the hero of the play.

They commenced to talk of him. His success had made as much noise as his voice. He had visited all the capitals, in the midst of the ecstasy of women, who knowing in advance that he was irresistible had quick little flutterings of the heart when he came upon the stage, but he did not seem to occupy himself about these sentimental ravings, it was said, and was quite contented with his musical triumphs. But Musadieu knew, and he told them in a low voice, so that Annette should not hear the life of this handsome singer, and the duchess who had been fairly carried away by his singing, un-

derstood and approved of all the follies that he had given rise to in women, because he was so wonderfully fascinating, distinguished, and elegant, such an exceptional musician!

"How could anyone resist a voice like that?" concluded the Duchess laughing. "Impossible."

Bertin felt angry and bitter. He really could not understand how women could be fascinated by a strolling actor, by one who continually represented types of human beings that never existed, by an illusive personification of men created by an idle fancy, by a nocturnal painted figure, who would play any rôle at so much a night.

"You are jealous, *mon cher,*" said the Duchess. "You others, you men of the world, and artists, all of you are simply jealous of actors, because they have more success than you."

She turned towards Annette.

"*Voyons, petite,* you who are beginning life and look upon things in a sane fashion, tell me, what do you think of this tenor?"

Annette replied in a decided tone.

"I think he is very nice, indeed I do."

The three knocks were given for the second act, and the curtain went up on the Kermesse. The passage of Helsson was superb. She also seemed to have a richer voice than formerly, and sang with a more complete confidence. She had now become the great, the exquisite cantatrice, whose renown equalled that of M. de Bismarck and M. de Lesseps.

When Faust sprang towards her and said in that captivating voice that phrase so full of charm:

Ne permettrez-vous pas, ma belle demoiselle,
Qu'on vous offre le bras, pour faire le chemin.[1]

and the fair, pretty, and bewitching Marguerite replied:

Non, Monsieur, je ne suis demoiselle ni belle
Et je n' ai pas besoin qu' on me donne la main,[2]

the entire house was stirred with a keen emotion of pleasure.

When the curtain fell the applause was tremendous. Annette clapped such a long time that Bertin felt like seizing her small hands in his to stop her. He did not speak to anyone during the short interval. His eyes and thoughts were following the odious singer who was able to work Annette to such a pitch of excitement — he could see him behind the scenes and his eye followed him to his *loge* and watched him as he dabbed another layer of paint on his cheeks.

Then the curtain went up on the Garden scene. Suddenly it seemed as though a sort of love fever was running through the audience, for never had the wonderful music, which now seemed to be nothing but a wave of kisses, had two such excellent interpreters. It was no longer two celebrated singers — Montrosé and Helsson, — it was two beings of an ideal world, scarcely two beings, but two voices, the immortal voice of the man who loves, and the immortal voice of the woman who submits, and together they breathed all the poetry of human love.

[1] Will you not permit me, fair maiden,
To give you my arm on the way?

[2] No, sir, I am neither fair nor a lady of high degree,
And I have no need of being accompanied.

When Faust sang:

Laisse-moi, laisse-moi contempler ton visage,[1]

there was such an accent of adoration, of transport, and of supplication in the notes that he sent forth, that for a moment the desire to love and be loved rose up in all hearts.

Olivier remembered how he himself had murmured the words in the park at Roncières, under the château windows. Until now he had always thought them a little commonplace, but now as he repeated them softly, it was like the last cry of passion, a last prayer, the last hope and the last favor that he could wait for in this life.

Then he listened to nothing more, he heard nothing more. A jealous rage tore him as he saw Annette lift her handkerchief to her eyes.

She was crying! It was the heart awakening — animated, excited, her little heart which until now had known nothing of love. There, sitting quite near to him, without her thinking of him, she had the revelation of the way in which love can overthrow a human being, and this revelation, this initiation, had come to her through a miserable strolling singer.

Ah! he had nothing now against the Marquis de Farandal, the fool who sat beside her seeing nothing, knowing nothing, understanding nothing. But how he abhorred the man in doublet and silk tights who had awakened a young girl's soul. He felt like throwing himself on the child, as one would throw himself on a person that a runaway horse was going to crush. He

[1] Let me, oh! let me gaze upon your face,

wanted to seize her in his arms to carry her away, crying: "Come away! Come away! I implore you." He did not want the knowledge to come to her like this.

How she listened! Her eyes sparkled, her breath came quickly. How excited she was! and how he suffered. He had suffered before, but less cruelly. He recalled all his sufferings, for each jealous grief rushes back to us when the wounds are re-opened. He remembered it was first at Roncières, as they were walking back from the cemetery, when he felt for the first time she was escaping him, that he had no influence over her — over this independent child who was like a young animal. But down there when she annoyed him, leaving him to go and pick her flowers, he felt a brutal wish to stop her from running away and force her body to stay near him. But to-day, it was the soul itself, which had just awakened and was flying away.

Ah! this gnawing pain which he was beginning to know now so well, he had felt it so often with all the little wounds; they seem so small, but have the power to make incessant pain in hearts that love.

He recalled all the painful impressions of small jealousies which had fallen on him — falling with a little sharp knock every day. Each time that she noticed, admired, liked or wanted something he was jealous of it; he was jealous of all, in a perpetual and imperceptible manner. Of everything that took up her time, her look, her attention, her astonishment, her affection, because all these things took her a little more away from him. He had been jealous of everything she did without him, of all the things in her life that happened that he did not know, of her amusements, her readings, everything that gave her pleasure; he had been

jealous of a wounded soldier, a hero in Africa whom Paris talked of and whom she thought of for eight days; of the author of a popular novel, of an unknown poet whom she had never seen but whose verses Musadieu had recited and she had become enraptured; in short, he was jealous of everyone whom she heard praised, even in an ordinary manner, because when one loves a woman one cannot tolerate without anguish the thought that she is thinking of any one else, with even a degree of interest. One feels the dominating wish to be the only one in her eyes. One does not want her to see, or know, or appreciate any other. As soon as she seems to have the wish to turn, and consider, or want to know some one else, one thrusts oneself upon her, and if one cannot bring her back or absorb her entirely, then one suffers from the depths of the soul.

Olivier had this jealous feeling now. This singer had awakened Annette's soul. This painted actor! He seemed to be diffusing and gathering in love from the entire house. Bertin felt an ill will to everyone who made this tenor's triumph, the women in the boxes who were so elated and the men — the simpletons — they were all making a god out of this fop. An artist! They called him an artist, a great artist! He had had some success, this coxcomb, this man who interpreted foreign thoughts in a way that no composer would ever have recognized. Ah! this was the fairness and the intelligence of society people, these ignorant and pretentious amateurs for whom the masters of the human arts work until their death. He looked at them applauding, shouting, crying, and the old hostility which had always fermented in the depths of this haughty and proud heart of a parvenu rose up in a furious rage

against these fools — who were all-powerful, solely by the right of their birth and money.

Until the end of the performance he was silent, a prey to his thoughts, then when the storm of the final enthusiasm had died away, he got up and offered his arm to the Duchess, and the Marquis offered his to Annette. They went down the wide staircase in the midst of a stream of men and women, in a sort of slow and magnificent cascade of white gleaming shoulders, exquisite gowns and evening dress. Then the Duchess, Annette, her father, and the Marquis said good-night, and got into the landau, and Olivier Bertin remained standing alone with Musadieu on the Place de l'Opéra.

He suddenly felt a great affection for Musadieu, or rather the natural attraction that one feels for a comrade one meets in a distant city, for now he felt lost in the midst of this unknown, indifferent crowd while with Musadieu he could still speak of Annette.

He took hold of his arm.

"Come along," he said. "You are not going home at once. Such a lovely night. Let us have a stroll."

"I'm willing," said Musadieu.

They walked towards the Madeleine, in the midst of the nightly crowd, in the short and great excitement of midnight, which seems to jolt the boulevards after the people pour out of the theaters.

Musadieu had a thousand things running through his head that he wanted to talk about, all the latest tittle-tattle talk which Bertin called his "Daily Menu." So he gave full rein to his eloquence and rushed through the subjects that interested him most.

The painter let him go on without listening, holding his arm all the while, waiting for the moment when he

could make him speak about Annette, and he walked on seeing nothing, and hearing nothing that was going on around him — imprisoned in his love.

He was weak and worn out by these feelings of jealousy which had bruised him, as though he had had a great fall; he was depressed by the certitude that now he had nothing more to live for. He would go on suffering more and more with nothing to look forward to. He would have lonely days one after the other, and he would see her afar off — living, happy, and loved; loving also without a doubt. A lover! Yes! She would have a lover perhaps, like her mother had had one.

He experienced so many phases of suffering so different and complicated, such an afflux of unhappiness, such hopeless misery, he felt so completely lost, that it seemed impossible to him that any one could ever have suffered as he did. And then he thought of the puerility of the poets who imagined the useless toil of Sisyphus, the material thirst of Tantalus, the consumed heart of Prometheus. Oh! if they had foreseen, if they had thought of the distracted love of an old man for a young girl, how could they have explained the abominable and secret effort of a being that one can no longer love, the tortures of the passion that is barren, and more terrible than a vulture's beak, a little fair girl cutting to pieces an old man's heart. Musadieu was still talking when Bertin interrupted him murmuring:

"She was lovely to-night, don't you think so, Musadieu?"

"Who?"

"Annette."

"Yes! exquisite."

The painter added to stop him from taking up the thread of his ideas again:

"I think she is prettier than her mother was, don't you?"

Musadieu agreed in an absent manner repeating several times "Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . ." without his mind grasping the subject. Olivier tried to get him to talk of her, so he artfully held out as a bait to him one of his favorite preoccupations.

"She will have one of the first drawing-rooms in Paris after her marriage," he said. That was sufficient. The frequenter of the smart *salons* was caught as well as the Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts. He doubly appreciated the position that the Marquise de Farandal would hold in French society. His eloquence now broke forth in this direction. Bertin listened to him. He could see Annette in her beautiful *salons* surrounded with distinguished men and elegant women. This vision made the miserable jealous feeling come again.

They walked up the Boulevard Malesherbes. As they passed before the Guilleroy's house the painter looked up. He could see the lights in the windows through the opening of the curtains.

Probably the Duchess and her nephew had been invited to take tea with them; he clenched his hand, but he still held Musadieu tightly by the arm and listened to him as he spoke of the young future Marquise. As he listened to Musadieu's ordinary voice, he seemed to see her image hovering in the night around them.

When they reached the Avenue de Villiers and stood before the painter's door, Bertin said:

"You will come in, won't you?"

"No, thank you, it is late. I am going home to bed."

"*Voyons!* Come up just for a half an hour, to have a little chat."

"No, really, Bertin, it is too late."

The thought of being alone, after all the agony he had gone through and was still going through, filled him with horror. He had some one with him now, and he meant to keep him for a time.

"Come up," he said. "I want you to choose a painting that I have long intended offering you."

Musadieu, who knew that artists were not always in a generous mood and that their memory of promises was short, jumped at the occasion.

In his quality of inspector of the Beaux-Arts he possessed a splendid collection of pictures.

"Go up, I'll follow," he said at once.

They went into the studio and the valet, waking up as they came in, soon set before them some refreshments, and they talked on paintings for some little time.

Bertin then showed some pictures to Musadieu and told him to take which he liked best. The inspector hesitated for a long time; he was afraid to make a choice, because he was worried about the lamp-light, which deceived him a little on the shades.

Finally he chose a group of little girls jumping with a skipping rope on the pavement. And almost at once he wanted to hurry off and carry his picture with him.

"I will have it sent to you," said the artist. "Sit down. Don't be in such a hurry."

"No! no!" said Musadieu. "I won't trouble you.

I must go now. I will take it with me to-night, so that I can admire it before going to bed."

Nothing could keep him and Olivier Bertin found himself once more alone in his home, this prison of old memories and present sufferings.

When the man came into his room the next morning, bringing the tea and the newspapers, he found his master sitting up in his bed, so deathly pale that he was afraid.

"You are sick, sir," he said quickly.

"It is nothing," answered Bertin. "A slight headache."

"Is there anything I can get for you, sir?"

"No! What is the weather like?"

"It is raining, sir."

"Ah! No, there is nothing more I want."

The man placed the tea service and the newspapers on the little table and left the room.

Olivier took the *Figaro* and opened it. The article that headed the page was entitled "*Modern Painters.*"

It was a dithyrambic eulogy of four or five young artists, who, endowed with real qualities of colorists and exaggerating them for effect, had the pretension to be revolutionists of genius.

Like all the senior painters, Bertin disliked these newcomers; he was annoyed by their ostracism and disputed their doctrines. He began to read the article with the feeling of anger that leaps up so quickly in a heart that is already unnerved; then, in glancing down the column, he saw his own name and these few words at the end of the article struck him like a blow of the fist on the chest:

"*The old fashioned art of Olivier Bertin.*" He

had always been very sensitive to criticism as well as to praise, but in his heart of hearts, although notwithstanding his legitimate vanity, he would feel more hurt at being censured than he would feel pleasure at being praised, as the result of the anxiety he felt for himself which his irresolution had always nourished. Although, in the days that had passed, when he had been at the height of his success, the flattery that had been showered upon him had been so great that it had made him ignore any slight criticism. But to-day, before the incessant pushing forward of the new artists by the new admirers, the congratulations had become rarer and the disparagement more frequent. He felt that he was enrolled in a regiment of old painters, whom the younger members of the profession no longer treated as masters, and as he was as intelligent as he was sensitive, he had now begun to feel the slightest insinuation as much as he would a direct attack.

Never before had any blow to his artist's pride made him suffer as keenly as he did at this moment. For a moment or two he gasped for breath, then he read the article over again slowly, so as to understand it in all its shades. He and some fellow artists were simply thrown down and trampled on with an outrageous ease.

He got up from his bed and dressed, muttering the newspaper paragraph reference to himself over and over again:

"*The old fashioned art of Olivier Bertin.*" Never had such sadness, such discouragement, such a feeling of the end of all things, of the end of his physical being and his mental being been able to throw him into a distress of the soul so utterly hopeless. He sat for two or three hours motion-

less in his great chair before the fireplace, his limbs stretched out before the fire, not seeming to have the strength to move or do anything whatever. Then the desire to be comforted came to him, the wish to clasp devoted hands, to see faithful eyes, to be consoled and caressed by a few kind friendly words. So he went as usual to the Countess.

When he was shown in, Annette was alone in the *salon*. She had her back turned to him and was writing an address quickly on an envelope. On the table at the side of her was the *Figaro* open. Bertin saw the newspaper at the same moment that he saw the young girl, and remained speechless, not daring to advance.

Oh! if she had read it! She turned round. She was in a great hurry and seemed very busy; her mind was entirely taken up with feminine worries.

"Oh! Good morning, *Monsieur le peintre,*" she said. "You will excuse me if I run off at once, won't you? The dressmaker is waiting for me. Of course you understand how important the dressmaker is when one is going to be married. Mama is discussing and arranging about the gowns with my artiste at this moment, but I will lend her to you. If I need her I shall ask you to give her back to me in a few minutes."

She left the room and ran quickly across the hall to show him what a great hurry she was in.

This abrupt departure, without a word of affection, not even a kind look for him, who loved her so much . . . so much, completely unnerved him. His eye again fell on the *Figaro*.

"Yes, she has read it," he said. "They poke fun at me. They deny me. She does not believe in me now.

I am no one to her." He took two steps towards the newspaper, with the movement that one would take towards a man to strike him. Then he said to himself: "Nevertheless, perhaps she has not read it. She is so busy to-day. But they will speak of it before her at dinner this evening, most likely, and then she will want to read it."

By a spontaneous movement, without thinking, he stretched out his hand for the paper, folded it up and slipped it in his pocket with the quick, stealthy manner of a thief.

The Countess came into the room. As soon as she saw Olivier's livid and convulsed face she knew that he had reached the limit of suffering.

She ran to him and placing her hands on his shoulders looked straight into his eyes.

"*Oh! mon ami*, how unhappy you are," she said.

He did not deny it this time and his throat shook with spasms as he said in a broken voice:

"Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . ."

She felt that he was going to break down entirely and drew him gently into the farthest corner of the room, towards a sofa hidden by a little screen of old tapestry. They sat there behind the fine embroidered shelter, shrouded also by the gray shadows of a rainy day.

She was heart-broken at seeing his misery. Her only thought was pity for him.

"My poor Olivier, how you are suffering," she said.

He leaned his white head on his friend's shoulder and pressed her hand.

"More than you can imagine, dear," he said.

She murmured so sadly:

"Oh! I know it. I have felt it. I saw it born, and I have watched it grow."

He replied as though she had accused him:

"It is not my fault, Any."

"I know it. I do not reproach you."

And then, softly bending her head a little towards him, she pressed her lips on his eyes, and found a bitter tear. She trembled as though she had tasted a drop of despair and she said again and again:

"Ah! poor friend . . . poor friend . . . poor Olivier."

Then after a moment of silence she said:

"It is the fault of our hearts, which have not grown old. I feel mine so young and full of life."

He tried to speak, but could not; his body was shaken with dry sobs.

She felt against her the choking suffocation in his chest. Then her own love for him, which for so long had raged within her, rose up again. With a heart-rending voice, as when one states a terrible calamity, she said:

"My God! How you must love her!"

He did not deny it.

"Ah! Yes, I love her . . . I love her," he murmured.

She remained thinking for a moment, then she said:

"You never loved me like this, did you?"

He did not lie to her; he was going through one of those hours when one can speak only the truth.

"No, I was too young then," he answered.

"Too young! How?" she asked in surprise.

"Because life was too smooth then. It is at the age we are now only, that one can love so desperately."

"That which you feel when you are near her, is it anything like what you felt when you were near me?" she asked.

"Yes, and no! Although it is almost the same thing. I loved you almost as much as one could love a woman. Annette, I love as I loved you, because she is part of you, but this love has now become something that is powerful, destructive, stronger than death. I am to this love as a house is to a fire which is burning it."

She felt her pity wither in a hot wave of jealousy. After a moment she said in a soothing voice:

"There, *mon pauvre ami.* In a few days she will be married and will go abroad. If you do not see her you will get cured without a doubt."

He shook his head.

"No, Any, I am lost . . . lost."

"No! no! You will be three months without seeing her. That will be sufficient. Three months was long enough for you to love her more than me, whom you had known for twelve years."

"Any, you will not leave me," he implored.

"What can I do, *mon ami?*"

"Don't leave me alone, Any."

"I will go and see you as much as you like."

"No! Keep me here as much as possible."

"You will be near her."

"And near to you."

"Olivier, you must not see her again before she is married."

"Oh! Any."

"Well, at least, very little."

"Can I stay here this evening?"

"No! Not in the state you are in. You must go and get some distraction — go to the club or to the theater — anywhere, it does not matter where, but you must not stay here."

"Oh! let me, Any," he pleaded.

"No, Olivier, it is impossible, and, besides, I have people coming whose presence would agitate you still more."

"The Duchess? and . . . he . . ."

"Yes."

"But I spent last evening with them."

"That was all very well, but you are too agitated to-day."

"I promise you I will be calm."

"No, it is impossible."

"Then I will go."

"Why in such a hurry?"

"I want to walk."

"That is right. Walk a lot. It will do you good. Walk until night. Kill yourself with fatigue and then go to bed."

He got up to go.

"Adieu, Any."

"Adieu, dear friend. I will call and see you to-morrow morning. Shall I commit an imprudence like I used to? Shall I pretend to have lunch here at mid-day and then go and take it with you at a quarter past one?"

"Yes, I should like that. How good you are."

"It is because I love you."

"I love you also."

"Oh; do not speak of that."

"Adieu, Any."

"Good-bye, dear friend. To-morrow, then."

"Adieu."

He kissed her hands — slow, fervent kisses — then her temples, then the corners of her lips. His eyes were dry now, his manner resolute.

As he was going out of the room he turned back and clasped her to him. He held her in his arms and pressed his lips on her forehead again and again; he seemed to drink — to inhale from her all the love that she had for him.

Then he went out quickly without looking back.

When she was alone she dropped onto the sofa and sobbed as though her heart would break. She would have stayed there until night if Annette had not come to look for her.

"Mother! mother! where are you? I want you," Annette called.

So as to have time to dry her red eyes she called back:

"I am coming in a moment, dear. I have a little note I want to write. I will come to you very soon."

Until the evening she had to occupy herself with the important question of the trousseau.

The Duchess and her nephew dined with the Guilleroys *en famille*. They all sat down to table and were just beginning to talk of the performance at the opera the night before when the butler came into the room carrying three large bouquets.

Madame de Mortemain looked up in surprise.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "What is all this?"

"Oh! are they not beautiful?" Annette cried. "Whoever could have sent them, mother?"

"Olivier Bertin, I suppose," her mother replied.

Since he had left the house she had thought of him incessantly. He had seemed so gloomy and tragical; she saw so clearly his unhappiness without end, she felt so keenly the rebound of this sadness, she loved him so much, so tenderly, so completely, that her heart was weighed down under a mournful presentiment.

In the three bouquets they found three of the painter's cards. He had written in pencil on each, the name of the Countess, the Duchess and Annette.

"Your friend Bertin, is he ill?" asked the Duchess. "I thought he looked fearfully sick yesterday."

"Yes, I have felt rather anxious about him," said Madame de Guilleroy. "But he does not complain."

"Oh, he is like us all," said her husband. "He is getting old. He has aged terribly lately. I always think that bachelors fail suddenly. They go down quicker than others. He certainly has changed greatly."

The Countess sighed.

"Indeed, yes," she said.

Farandal stopped whispering to Annette.

"There was a very disagreeable article about him in the *Figaro* this morning," he said.

The Countess flared up. Any attack, criticism, the slightest unfavorable allusion to her friend made her indignant.

"Oh!" she said hotly, "men who are as talented as Bertin can be above taking notice of such coarseness. Bah!"

"*Tiens!* A disagreeable article about Olivier," said the Count in astonishment. "I did not read it. What page was it on?"

The Marquis told him.

"On the first page at the top, under the heading of "Modern Painters."

The deputy was no longer astonished that he had not read it.

"Ah! Yes, perfectly. I did not read it because it was about painting," he said.

There was a general smile, every one knew that outside of politics and agricultural affairs M. de Guilleroy took no interest in anything else. Then the conversation ran on other subjects until they went in the *salon* to take coffee. The Countess scarcely spoke a word all the evening. She was full of anxious thoughts of Olivier. Where was he? Where had he dined? Where was he dragging his incurable misery at this moment? She now felt a piercing regret for letting him go. Why had she not kept him with her and looked after him? She could imagine him roaming along the streets so sad — wandering along, alone, shrinking under his grief. Until it was time for the Duchess and her nephew to go she remained quietly sitting in her chair thinking — vague and superstitious fears seemed to hover around her. When she went to her room she lay in her bed with eyes wide open, looking out into the dark shadows of night and thinking of him.

Hours seemed to have passed when she thought she heard the bell of the apartment ringing. She started and sat up in bed to listen. For the second time a ringing vibrated in the silent house. She jumped out of bed and pressed the electric button that connected with the servants' quarters, then with a lighted candle in her hand she ran into the hall.

Across the door she asked:

"Who is there?"

A strange voice replied:

"I have a letter."

"A letter from whom?"

"From a doctor," said the voice.

"What doctor?"

"I don't know. It is about an accident."

She hesitated no longer. She drew the bolts and opened the door and stood face to face with a cabman in a great-coat and oilskin hat. He had a letter in his hand, which he handed to her. It was in a strange handwriting. She read:

> "Très urgent —
> Monsieur le Comte de Guilleroy —"

"Come in, my good man," she said, "and sit down here and wait for me."

As she stood outside her husband's bedroom door her heart beat so violently that she could not call him, so she struck the wood with the metal candlestick she held in her hand. The Count was sound asleep and heard nothing.

Then she became impatient and unnerved; she kicked at the door with her foot, and she heard a sleepy voice call out:

"Who is there? What time is it?"

"It is I," she called back. "I have an urgent letter for you that a cabman has just brought. There has been an accident."

"Wait a minute," he called. "I'll get up. I'm coming."

In a few seconds he came out in his dressing-gown.

At the same moment two servants, who had been awakened by the bell, came hurrying forward. They were scared and amazed to see a strange man sitting in the dining-room.

The Count took the letter and turned it over in his fingers.

"What can it be? I cannot imagine," he said.

"Read it, then, and see," she said impatiently.

He tore open the envelope and unfolded the sheet of paper, then gave a startled cry and looked at his wife with frightened eyes.

"My God! What is it? Tell me, quick," she said.

He could scarcely speak, he was so overcome with emotion.

"Oh! something dreadful . . . dreadful . . . Bertin has been run over," he said in a shaky voice.

"Dead!" she cried.

"No! no! Read it yourself."

She snatched the letter he held out to her from his hand and read:

"Sir, a terrible misfortune has happened. Our friend, the eminent artist, M. Olivier Bertin, was knocked down by a car, which passed over his body. I cannot as yet state anything definite as to the results of this accident. They may not be serious, but should complications set in it might prove fatal. M. Bertin begs that you and Madame la Comtesse de Guilleroy will come to him at once. I trust, sir, that you and Madame la Comtesse will immediately grant this request of our mutual friend, who may have ceased to live before daybreak. DR. DE RIVIL."

The Countess looked at her husband with wide-fixed eyes, full of terror. Then suddenly she received like an electric shock that rush of courage which can make a timid woman at the most terrible moment the most courageous being.

Turning to the servant she said:

"Quick. I want to dress."

"What will Madame put on?" her maid asked.

"It doesn't matter. Get anything."

"You be ready in five minutes, Jacques," she said to her husband. Then she turned to go to her room, her heart trembling with fear. As she passed the dining-room she noticed the cabman, who was still waiting.

"You have your cab?" she said to him.

"Yes, Madame."

"That is well. We will take it."

She ran into her bedroom. She got into her clothes desperately with quick movements; she hooked, tied and buttoned them any way; then, standing before her mirror, she screwed her hair into a knot, but this time as she stood before her glass she did not notice the pale, drawn face and haggard eyes. When she had thrown a cloak over her shoulders she rushed to her husband's room. He was not yet dressed.

She forced him to go with her.

"Never mind, Jacques, don't stop for anything. He may die before we get there," she said.

The Count was scared and followed her, stumbling along and groping his way down the dark staircase, trying to make out the steps so as not to fall.

The drive was short and silent. The Countess looked out of the cab windows and saw the flickering gas jets veiled with a gray mist and rain. The pave-

ments were glimmering with the rain; the boulevard was deserted, the night sinister.

When they arrived at the painter's home they found the door wide open; the concierge's *loge* was lit up and empty.

On the top of the stairs Dr. Rivil came to meet them. He was a short, plump little man, well-groomed and with very polished manners.

He made a deep bow to the Countess and held out his hand to the Count.

"Well, doctor," said Madame de Guilleroy, her breath coming in gasps as though the walk up the stairs had exhausted her.

"*Eh bien!* Madame, I hope that it will not be as serious as I thought at first."

"He will not die?" she cried.

"No! At least, I do not think so."

"You are not sure?"

"No. I only say that I hope it is merely a simple abdominal contusion without internal injuries."

"What do you call internal injuries?"

"Lacerations."

"How do you know that he has not any?"

"I suppose so."

"If he has?"

"Oh, then it is very serious."

"He would die?"

"Yes."

"Very quickly?"

"Yes, very quickly. In a few minutes or even a few seconds. But rest assured, Madame, I am convinced that he will be up and about in fifteen days."

She had listened to him with great attention so as to understand all.

"What lacerations could he have?" she asked.

"His liver might be torn, for instance."

"Is that very dangerous?"

"Yes . . . but I should be surprised if complications set in now. Let us go to him. It will do him good to see you, for he has been very impatient since the messenger started."

What she first saw on going into the room, was a pallid face on a white pillow; a few candles and the light from the fire lit it up, showing the profile and accentuating the shades, and in this livid face the Countess saw two eyes which looked at her as she went in.

All her courage, strength and resolution fell at once, for she knew that she was looking at the hollow and distorted face of a dying man. He whom she had seen a short while ago had become this thing — this phantom.

"My God!" she murmured between her teeth, as she walked towards the bed trembling with awe.

He tried to smile to reassure her, and the grimace of this attempt was frightful.

When she was quite near to the bed she placed her two hands on his, which was stretched outside the bed coverings near his body.

"Oh! my poor friend," she said.

"It is nothing," he replied in a very low voice, without turning his head. She looked at him, now aghast at the change. He was so deathly white that it seemed that he had not a drop of blood under the skin. His hollow cheeks seemed to be drawn in from the interior

of the face and his eyes were sunken in the sockets as though a thread was drawing them from the inside. He saw the look of terror in his friend's face and sighed.

"I'm in a fine state," he said, trying to smile again.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

He made a great effort to be able to talk, and at times his entire face quivered with nervous spasms.

"I did not look where I was going . . . I was thinking of something else . . . my thoughts were far away . . . Oh; yes, and the car came along, and I fell and it passed over my stomach."

In listening to him she could see the accident, and she said, starting with horror:

"Did you bleed?"

"No, I am only a little bruised, a little crushed," he said.

"Where did it happen?"

"I am not quite sure," he said in a low voice. "It was a long way from here."

The doctor rolled a *fanteuil* to the bedside and the Countess dropped into it.

The Count stood at the foot of the bed, repeating between his teeth:

"Oh! my poor friend, my poor friend, this is terrible."

He felt a great sorrow, for he had grown to like Olivier very much.

"But where did it happen?" the Countess asked again.

"I do not even know," said the doctor. "Or, rather, I do not understand where it could have been.

They gazed at each other.

It was somewhere near the Gobelins — almost outside of Paris, at least, so the cabman who brought him here told me. He said he had taken him from a druggist in that quarter; he had been carried in there at nine o'clock in the evening."

Then, bending over Olivier, she said:

"Is it true that the accident happened near the Gobelins?"

Bertin closed his eyes as though trying to remember.

"I don't know," he said.

"But where were you going?"

"I don't remember. I was walking straight ahead."

A groan that she could not stop came from her pale lips. Then, after a choking that left her a few seconds without breath, she pulled out her handkerchief from her pocket and putting it to her eyes began to sob bitterly.

She knew. She understood now. Something intolerable, overwhelming, fell upon her heart. The remorse of not having kept Olivier with her; why had she not let him stay when he pleaded so. She had driven him out, thrown him into the street, where he had fallen, dazed with grief, under the car.

He said to her in the dull, lifeless voice that he now had:

"Do not cry. It hurts me."

By a marvelous effort of will she stopped sobbing and drew her handkerchief from her eyes and fixed them on his eyes, without a quiver moving her face, but the tears continued to fall slowly. They gazed at each other, both of them motionless, their hands touching on the counterpane of the bed. They looked at one an-

other oblivious that there were others present in the room, and their look brought from one heart to the other an emotion that was more than human.

There came between them a quick, silent and rising up of all their memories, of all their crushed tenderness, the love they had felt together, all that they had united and mingled in their lives, in the temptation which gave them to each other.

They looked at one another and the need to hear the thousand intimate sad things they still had to say was silently spoken by them both.

She felt that she must at any price get the two men who stood behind them out of the room. She must find some means — a ruse, an inspiration — she who had always been so quick with resources. And she began to think, keeping her eyes still fixed on Olivier.

Her husband and the doctor talked in low voices; they were discussing the care he would need.

Turning round, she said to the doctor:

"Have you brought a nurse?"

"No. I prefer to send a surgeon from the hospital; he is the better one for a case like this."

"Send both. One cannot have too much care. Can you get them to-night? For I suppose you are not staying here until the morning."

"No, I was just going. I have been here four hours. There is nothing more I can do."

"Then you will send the nurse and the surgeon at once?"

"It is difficult to do so in the middle of the night, Madame."

"It must be done."

"They will perhaps promise, but will they come?"

"My husband will go with you and will bring them back by persuasion or force."

"You cannot stay here alone, Madame."

"I cannot . . ." she said with a sort of cry of defiance — an indignant protest against any who disputed her will. "And why not? My husband must go and get some one immediately." And then she explained the necessities of the situation with an authority of manner which admitted no reply. Before an hour a nurse and a surgeon must be there so as to be ready in case of emergency. To get them, of course, it was necessary to go and rouse them from their beds and bring them along. Her husband could do that alone. While he was gone she would stay beside the sick man — she, whose right and duty it was. She was simply fulfilling her rôle of a friend — of a woman. Besides, she wished it so, and that was all there was to be said in the matter. Her reasoning was sensible. They agreed to it and decided to follow her advice for thy realized that nothing would make her swerve from her determination. She stood up. She was anxious to hurry the two men off so as to be alone with Olivier.

She listened attentively to the doctor's last instructions. She tried to fix her mind and understand all he said so as to make no mistakes during his absence. The valet came into the room and stood beside her, listening also, and his wife, the cook, stood in the doorway. She had helped the doctor when he first dressed the wounds and she indicated by repeatedly nodding her head that she also had equally understood.

When the Countess had said over and over again, like a lesson, all the instruments, she urged the two men to go, saying to her husband:

"Go now, because I want you to come back quickly. Above all, come back quickly."

"I will take you in my coupé," Dr. Rivil said to the Count. "You will get there quicker. You will be back here in less than an hour."

Before leaving he again carefully examined the wounded man, so as to be assured that his condition was satisfactory.

Guilleroy still hesitated. He felt very anxious about Bertin.

"Do you think we are wise to leave him, doctor?" he asked.

"Oh, it is all right. There is no serious danger, I assure you. He only wants rest and quiet. Madame de Guilleroy must not let him speak and must speak to him as little as possible."

The Countess started.

"He must not talk?" she said.

"Oh, no, Madame. Take your chair and sit beside him. He will not feel alone if some one sits near to him, but no fatigue. He must not get tired from talking or even from thinking. I shall be here by nine o'clock to-morrow morning." He bowed low to her and went out of the room, followed by the Count, who turned round at the door to say to his wife:

"Don't get anxious, my dear. Before an hour I shall be back and then you can go home."

When they had gone she listened to the door closing, then to the carriage rolling away in the distance. The valet and the cook were still in the room, waiting for orders. She dismissed them. "You can go now," she said to them. "I will ring if I need anything."

They left the room and she was alone with him.

She went back to the bed and placing her two hands on the pillow, each side of the beloved face, she bent over to look at him. Then she asked, so near to his face that it seemed that she was breathing the words onto his skin:

"You threw yourself underneath the car?"

He replied, still trying to smile:

"No, the car threw itself over me."

"That is not true; it was you."

"No, it was the car."

After a few moments of silence — those moments when souls seem to entwine themselves in looks she murmured:

"Oh, my dear Olivier, to think that I made you go. Why did I not keep you?"

"It would have happened to me all the same sooner or later," he replied with conviction.

They looked into each other's eyes, trying to read their most secret thoughts.

"I don't think I shall get better," he said. "I am suffering so much."

"You are in pain?" she cried.

"Oh, yes."

Leaning a little over him, she brushed his forehead, then his eyes, then his cheeks with slow kisses, light and delicate — as soft and gentle as the little attentions we give to the sick. The tip of her lips scarcely touched him; it was like the little fluttering breath that a child gives when it embraces, and it lasted a long time — a very long time.

He let the shower of soft and light caresses fall on

him. They seemed to soothe him and take part of his suffering away, for little by little his face became more peaceful.

"Any," he said presently.

She stopped her caresses to listen.

"What, *mon ami?*"

"You must make me a promise."

"I will promise anything that you ask, dear."

"If I am not dead before daybreak swear to me that you will bring Annette here only once . . . just once, Any. I cannot die without seeing her again. Think that . . . to-morrow . . . at this hour . . . perhaps I shall . . . perhaps my eyes will be closed forever . . . and I shall never see either of you again . . . I . . . neither you . . . nor Annette."

She stopped him. Her heart was bleeding.

"Oh! stop . . . stop . . . Yes, I promise I will bring her."

"You swear it."

"I swear it, my friend; but stop, do not say more. You are hurting me so . . . Stop."

He had a sharp, convulsive spasm of all his features. When it had passed he said:

"If we have only a few more minutes to stay together, do not let us lose them. Let us say our adieux. I have loved you so much."

She sighed.

"And I . . . How I have loved you — always."

Again he said:

"I have had nothing but happiness from you, Any.

These last days only have been hard. It was not your fault . . . Ah! my poor Any . . . life is so sad sometimes . . . and it is so — so difficult to die."

"Stop, Olivier . . . I implore you . . ."

He continued without heeding her:

"I should have been happy always if you had not had your daughter."

"Oh! Olivier, stop . . . have pity on me."

He seemed to be thinking more than talking; he did not seem to hear her; he went on in a low, dreamy voice:

"Ah; he who created this existence and made men was very blind or very wicked."

"Olivier, I implore . . . if you ever loved me, you will stop . . . do not speak like this . . . you will break my heart."

She gazed at him as she bent over him, her face so pallid that she herself looked like a dying person, and he was silent.

She sat back in her chair near to the bed and took his hand, which lay on the coverlet.

"Now, you must not speak any more," she said. "Do not move, and think of me as I think of you."

They kept silent looking at each other, joined by the burning contact of their flesh. Now and again she pressed the feverish hand that she held in hers and he answered this appeal by closing his fingers tightly over hers. Each of these little pressures told them something; they stirred in their memories the stagnant remembrances of their love. Each was a secret question, each a secret answer — sad questions, sad answers — these "do you remember it?" of an old love. In this

meeting of anguish which would perhaps be the last their spirits brought up across the years all the history of their love.

There was no sound in the room but the crackling of the log fire. Suddenly he said, as though he was coming from a dream, with a start of terror:

"Your letters!"

"What? My letters?" she asked.

"I should have died without destroying them. Oh! Any."

"What does that matter to me?" she cried. "I don't care about them. They may find them and read them, nothing matters now."

"I do not wish it," he replied. "Get up, Any, and open the last drawer in my desk — the large one. They are all there, every one of them. You must take them and burn them."

She remained in her seat and shivered as though he had asked her to do a cowardly thing.

"Any, I beg you to do it," he said. "If you do not do it you will torment and madden me. It must be done. Think! They may fall into the hands of anyone, the lawyer . . . the servant . . . or even your husband. You must do it."

She rose slowly from her seat.

"No, it is too hard — too cruel, Olivier. It seems that you are making me burn our two hearts."

He begged her. His face changed under the agony he was going through.

Seeing him suffer, she went slowly towards the desk. She opened the drawer and saw it full to the top, a thick pile of letters, heaped one upon another, and she saw on the envelopes the two lines of the address that she had

written so many times in the last twelve years. How well she knew them! these two lines — the name of a man, the name of a street. She knew them as well as she knew her own name — as well as one can know the few words which mean all the hope and the happiness in life. She looked at the little square pieces of paper which contained all that she had been able to tell him of her love — all that she could snatch from herself to give him on a little piece of paper with a little ink.

He tried to turn his head on the pillow to look at her.

"Burn them quickly, Any," he said.

Then she took two handfuls and held them for a moment in her hands. It seemed a hard and sorrowful task. There were so many different things contained in these letters — things that had passed, that had been so fragrant and sweet. It was the soul of her soul, the heart of her heart, the essence of her love that she held in her two hands. She recalled with what joy she had scribbled some of them, with what exaltation — the intoxication of living — of loving some one, and to be able to tell it.

"Burn them — burn every one, Any," Olivier said again.

With a quick movement of her two hands she threw them into the fire, the two handfuls scattered as they fell on the burning logs. Then she took more from the drawer and threw them on the top,— then still more. She stooped and rose again from the fire with the same quick movement, hurrying to finish as quickly as possible the cruel task.

When the fireplace was full and the drawer empty, she stood before the chimney,— waiting, looking at the

flames, that had been almost extinguished by the heap of envelopes. She watched them creeping round the pile. First they attacked the borders, nibbling the corners, drawing back, obliterating, catching again, and getting larger. Soon there was a quick belt of clear fire around the white pyramid, which filled the room with a bright light, and this light lit up the woman standing by the fire, and the man lying on the bed, it was their love changed to ashes.

The Countess turned round and in the vivid light of the flames, she saw her friend's haggard face leaning over the edge of the bed.

"Are all there?" he asked.

"Yes, all," she answered.

Before going back to him she gave the fire a last look, and on the heap of half burnt papers which curled and twisted and then became black, she saw something red flowing. It looked like drops of blood. It seemed to come from the very heart of the letters, from each letter it flowed as though coming from a wound, and it glided slowly towards the flame leaving behind a dull purple trail. The Countess gazed at the crimson fluid, and her eyes widened with horror, her soul received the shock of a supernatural terror, and she recoiled as though she had seen the murder of some one. For a few minutes she stood spell-bound, her heart fluttering like a caged bird. Then suddenly she understood, she had only seen the crimson seal of her crest as it melted.

Then she turned to the wounded man and raising his head gently, put it back on the middle of the pillow; but he had moved too much and the pain had returned. He gasped for breath and his face began to twitch with intense suffering; he seemed not to know that she

She gave the fire a last look.

was there. He kept his eyes turned obstinately from her.

She waited for the spasms to pass, for him to look at her again, so that she could say some kind words to him. At last she said:

"Are you suffering much, *mon ami?*"

He did not reply.

She bent over him and placed a finger on his forehead to make him look at her. He opened his eyes — but they were wild eyes — eyes of delirium, which looked up at her.

She was terrified.

"You are in pain, Olivier. Speak to me, my friend. Shall I call? Try and say something to me, dear."

His lips moved.

"Bring her to me. You swore you would. You must bring her," he said.

Then he quivered under the sheets, his body twisted, his face was convulsed and grimacing.

"Olivier. . . . My God, . . . tell me, what is it. . . . Shall I call?"

He heard her this time, for he replied: "No! Any, it is nothing."

He seemed now to be exhausted, he suffered less, and suddenly fell into a sort of stupor. Hoping that he was going to sleep, the Countess sat beside the bed, and took his hand again and waited. He did not move, his chin had dropped on his chest. Short breaths came through his half open mouth seeming to scrape the throat as they passed. Only his fingers moved, every now and again they shook quickly. The Countess could feel the light spasmodic shakes to the very roots of her hair. She trembled so she wanted to cry out.

It was no longer the little voluntary pressures which told, instead of the tired lips, all the sorrow of his heart; it was the unappeased spasms which were telling the torment of the body. Now she was afraid — a fearful terror came upon her, and a mad wish to fly, to ring, or call for someone, but she dared not move for fear he would suffer more.

Now and again as she sat there motionless she heard the distant noise of a carriage. She listened to hear if the rolling of the wheels would stop at the door.

Was it her husband coming back to deliver her, to snatch her away from this sinister vigil?

As she tried to draw her hand away from Olivier's, he tightened his fingers over hers and heaved a deep sigh. Then she resigned herself to wait, she would not disturb him, some one would come soon.

The fire died in the grate under the black ashes of the letters; two candles burnt down in their sockets and flickered out; the furniture creaked strangely.

In the house all was quiet, all seemed dead except the great Flemish clock on the staircase which regularly chimed the hour, the half hour, and the quarter hour, singing in the night the March of Time, modulating it on its various tones.

The Countess sat motionless, feeling a great terror creeping round her heart. Nightmares came upon her, terrifying thoughts troubled her mind, and it seemed to her that Olivier's fingers were getting cold in hers. Was it true? No! No! it was not so! It was only her imagination! But where did this feeling of strange and icy contact come from? She got up trembling with fear to look into his face.— He had relaxed, he was impassive, inanimate, indifferent to all misery, suddenly appeased by the Eternal Oblivion.

THE OLIVE GROVE

I

WHEN the men of the harbor, the little harbor of Garando, in Provence, on the bay of Pisca, between Marseilles and Toulon, saw the boat of Father Vilbois coming back from a fishing trip, they went down on the beach to help him land.

The Father was alone and he rowed like a true sailor, with rare energy for his fifty-eight years. His sleeves were rolled up over his muscular arms and he had lifted the hem of his gown and was holding it between his knees. His hat lay on the bench beside him and he had donned a sort of white linen helmet. Thus arrayed, he appeared the truly strong priest of tropical countries, as much at home in the battle for life as in his priestly duties.

From time to time he would glance over his shoulder to determine his landing point; then he would turn to his oars again and apply them with regular, vigorous strokes, to show the poor sailors of the South once again how the Northern men handle their oars.

The boat ran ashore and darted over the sand as if it were going to climb the whole beach; then it stopped short and the five men who were watching the priest approached smilingly, for they liked their pastor.

"Eh ben!" exclaimed one of them, with the strong accent of Provence, "did you have good luck, monsieur le curé?"

Father Vilbois drew in his oars, removed his helmet, put on his three-cornered hat, pulled his sleeves down, buttoned his gown to the throat, and having thus reassumed his priestly prestige, he proudly replied:

"Yes, yes, very good luck, three cat-fish, two sea-eels and several small fishes."

The five fishermen had gathered round the boat and, peering over the edge, examined the catch with trained eyes. They commented on the fat eels, the flat-headed cat-fish and the other purple and orange-colored denizens of the deep.

Said one of the men:

"I'll carry 'em home for you, monsieur le curé."

"Thanks, my good man."

After shaking hands all around, the priest set out toward his bungalow, followed by one of the fishermen. The other four remained behind to look after the boat.

He walked with great strides and an air of strength and dignity. As the vigorous exercise of rowing had warmed him, he removed his hat from time to time when he passed under the shade of the olive-trees, to let the cool evening breeze play on his square brow covered with thick, closely cropped white hair, the brow of an officer rather than the brow of a priest. The village was built on a hillock, in a large valley that descended like a plain to the sea.

It was an evening in July. The blazing sun, nearing the crest of the far-off hills, cast over the white road buried under a thick layer of dust, the long shadow of Father Vilbois, whose enormous three-cornered hat made a big black blotch on a neighboring field and seemed to climb the trunks of the olive-trees as he walked along.

Under his feet rose a cloud of fine powder, that impalpable flour which, in the summertime, covers the roads of Provence; it flew around him and deposited a light coat of gray dust on the edge of his gown. Refreshed by the cooling breeze, Father Vilbois proceeded slowly on his way, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, like some powerful mountaineer making an ascension. His calm eyes rested on the distant village, *his* village, where he had dwelt twenty years and which he had chosen and obtained as a great favor. He hoped to die there. The church, *his* church, crowned the cone of houses that clustered about it with its two square brown towers, which, in this beautiful Southern valley, looked more like the defenses of a stronghold than the steeples of a sacred monument.

The abbé was happy, for had he not caught three cat-fish, two eels and several other fine specimens?

Again he would be able to triumph innocently over his parishioners, he, their priest, whom they respected especially because he was, in spite of his age, the most powerfully built man of the region. Those little triumphs were his greatest pleasure. He could shoot flowers off their stems and often practiced with the owner of the cigar store in the village, who was a former army provost, and he could swim better than any of the men of the coast.

Father Vilbois had once been the baron de Vilbois, a great society man, who had entered the priesthood when he was thirty-two years old, after an unfortunate love-affair.

The offspring of an old religious and royalistic Picardy family, which, for generations, had given its sons to the army, the magistrature and the Church, he had

first thought of entering the priesthood on the advice of his mother. Then, obeying the pleadings of his father, he decided to come to Paris, study law and obtain some important office in the Palais de Justice.

But, while he was completing his law course, his father died of pneumonia, which he had contracted while on a hunting trip, and his mother, prostrated by the death of the head of the family, soon followed him to the grave. The young son came into a large fortune and, abandoning the idea of a career, took up the life of a mere man about town.

Good-looking, intelligent, although a trifle narrow-minded through his early home training and hereditary principles, which were as much a part of him as his powerful muscles, he soon became socially prominent and lived a life such as any rich, well-thought-of and somewhat rigid young man might live.

But it happened that, through a friend, he met a youthful actress, a pupil of the "Conservatoire," who had just made a most successful début at the "Odéon."

He fell in love with her, with all the violence and enthusiasm of a man brought up to believe in the absolute. He fell in love with her because he saw her through the glamour that poesy and fame cast around woman.

She was pretty and naturally perverse, although she had the look of an innocent child. He called it her angel look. She bewitched him so completely that she turned him into one of those raving maniacs, one of those ecstatic lunatics whom a woman's glance can burn on the pyre of Mortal Passions.

She became his mistress and he made her leave the stage. He loved her devotedly four years, with an ever-growing passion. In spite of his old name and

family traditions, he would certainly have married her, had he not discovered, one day, that she deceived him with the friend who had brought them together.

The shock was rendered all the more terrible by the fact that she was " enceinte " and that he was awaiting the birth of the child to propose marriage.

When he held the proof of her faithlessness in his hands, he had found some compromising letters, he reproached her with her deceit and dastardly conduct.

But she, a true child of the streets, as impudent as she was immodest and as bold as those women of the masses who mount barricades just for the fun of it, braved and insulted him; and when he raised his hand to strike her down, she showed him her waist.

He stopped and paled at the sight. Here was a child of his! A child of his lived in this vile creature, this impure woman! Then he rushed at her to crush out her life and annihilate the double infamy. Feeling that she was doomed and frightened almost out of her wits by her lover's passionate anger, seeing that he was about to stamp out the life within her, she held out her hands to parry the blow and cried:

" Don't kill me, don't kill me! It isn't your child, it's his! "

He sprang back in utter bewilderment and stammered:

" What . . . what did you say? "

And the girl, crazed with fear at the glimpse she had had of death at his hands, repeated:

" It isn't your child, it's his."

Between clenched teeth he muttered:

" The child? "

" Yes."

"You lie."

And again he made a threatening gesture. The kneeling girl backed away from him and stuttered:

"I tell you it's his. If it were yours, wouldn't I have had one long ago?"

Her statement struck him as supremely plausible. In one of those mental flashes in which every argument stands forth with great clearness and distinctness, he was convinced that he was not the father of the wretched child which this debased woman carried and the thought quieted him so that he gave up his design to destroy the polluted creature.

Then in a calmer voice he said:

"Get up and get out, I never want to lay eyes on you again."

Conquered, she obeyed his command and left the house.

He never saw her again.

Then he went away, too. He went South and stopped in a village on the shore of the Mediterranean. An inn overlooking the sea caught his fancy; he engaged a room and remained. He stayed there eighteen months, in despair and sorrow and complete isolation. He was pursued by the charm of the faithless woman and longed for her presence and caresses.

He wandered disconsolately through the villages and under the grayish olive-trees, nursing his sorrow.

But all his former ideas of religion, all the ardent faith of his boyhood came back to him little by little during this mournful period. Religion, which formerly had appeared to him as a refuge from a life he ignored, now seemed to him a haven against deceit and torment. He always had preserved his faith in prayer. And

often, in the gloaming, he would enter the little church where a lamp burned over the altar to signify the Divine Presence.

He confided in God and told Him his unhappiness. He asked for help, pity, protection and consolation and his prayers every day grew more fervent.

His wounded heart, filled with love for a woman, remained open and palpitating and eager for tenderness; so little by little, his prayers and his solitary life, the habit of close communion with the Saviour who calls and consoles the wretched, awakened in him a mystical love of God which triumphed over the lusts of the flesh.

Then he took up his first plan and determined to offer up his broken life on the altar of Duty and Religion.

So he became a priest. Through his family connections he obtained a call to the village in Provence, where chance had flung him, and, having turned over a large portion of his fortune to charitable institutions, and retained only a small part of it to alleviate the poverty of his flock, he took refuge in a life of abnegation and devotion to his fellow-creatures.

He became a narrow-minded but kindly priest, a sort of religious guide with a soldier's temperament, who forced blind and erring humanity into the straight path and rescued it as best he could from the wilderness of life, where all instincts, tastes and desires are so many paths that lead to destruction. But a great deal of the former man clung to him. He never gave up his liking for violent exercise, noble sports, and he hated all women with the dread that a child feels before an unknown danger.

II

The sailor who followed the priest felt a real Southern desire to be sociable. But he did not dare to begin a conversation, for all of the abbé's flock held the latter in great awe. Finally, however, he picked up courage.

"So," said he, "you like your bungalow, monsieur le curé?"

Father Vilbois' bungalow was one of those tiny houses that shelter the inhabitants of the cities and villages of Provence during the summer months. The Father rented this bungalow, which was built in an open field and was at a stone's throw from his parish-house, that was too small and close to the church.

But, even in summer, he did not live there regularly, but only spent a few days in it now and then, to breathe the pure country air and make short hunting trips.

"Yes, my friend," replied the priest, "I like it very well."

The bungalow showed through the trees as they approached. It was a pink structure which the boughs and leaves of the olive-trees almost hid from view, and it looked like a mushroom that had sprung up in the field over night.

They also caught sight of a tall woman moving to and fro before the door, setting a small table. She carried out one object at a time and placed it deliberately on the white cloth, first a plate, then a napkin and a piece of bread, and lastly, a glass. She wore the little bonnet affected by the women of Arles and which is nothing but a pointed cone of black silk or velvet, ornamented with a white rosette.

When the Father was within earshot he shouted:

"Hey, Marguerite?"

She paused in her work and looked up. She recognized her master.

"Why, is it you, monsieur le curé?"

"Yes, I've had fine luck and I want you to broil me a cat-fish right away, with nothing but butter on it, do you hear?"

The servant, who had advanced to meet the men, examined the fishes with a trained eye.

"I already have cooked a chicken with rice," she said.

"Well, it can't be helped; a fish that is kept over never tastes as good as one that has just been caught. I will have a little feast. It doesn't occur very often and, besides, it's not such a great sin, after all."

The servant picked out a fish, and as she turned to go into the bungalow, she said:

"Ah! monsieur le curé, a man was here three times to see you."

Indifferently Father Vilbois inquired:

"A man! What sort of a man?"

"A man who didn't look like much."

"What! Was he a beggar?"

"Perhaps; I don't know. I think, though, he must have been a 'mafouatan.'"

Father Vilbois burst out laughing at the word, which, in the language of Provence, designates a tramp, a marauder, for he knew Marguerite's timidity and that she could never spend a day or a night in the bungalow without imagining that they would be murdered.

He handed a few sous to the sailor who had accompanied him and the man went away. Just as Father

Vilbois, who had given up none of the former habits of a well-groomed man, said: "I'm going to wash my hands," Marguerite called to him from the kitchen, where she was engaged in scraping the silvery fish with a knife:

"There he is now."

The abbé looked toward the road and caught sight of an ill-clad man nearing the house with slow steps. He waited, smiling at the terror of his cook and thinking: "Really, I think she's right; he certainly looks like a 'mafouatan.'"

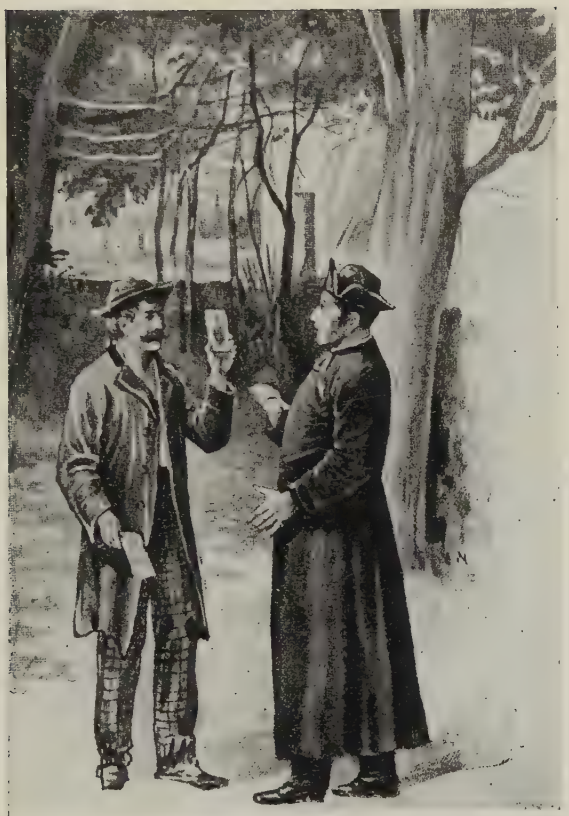
The stranger approached leisurely, with his hands thrust in his pockets and his eyes resting on the priest. He was young and wore a full, blonde beard and whisps of curly hair straggled from beneath his soft felt hat, which was so battered and old that its former color and shape were not recognizable.

He wore a long brown overcoat, a pair of frayed trousers, and sandals that lent to his walk something uncanny and suspicious.

When he was within a few feet of Father Vilbois he raised, with a theatrical gesture, the rag that protected his brow and showed a faded, pleasing face and a bald spot on the top of his head, a sign of precocious debauchery and fatigue, for he certainly was not more than twenty-five years old. The priest also removed his hat, feeling instinctively that this man was not an ordinary tramp, a laborer out of work or some convict hovering on the brink of jail and hardly knowing anything save the mysterious tongue spoken in penitentiaries.

"Bonjour, monsieur le curé," said the man.

The priest simply replied, "I salute you," for he did



"And that face, do you know it?"

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not care to address as "monsieur" this suspicious-looking individual. They looked at each other intently and Father Vilbois felt as troubled by the gaze of this vagabond as if he were confronting some unknown enemy; he felt overwhelmed by one of those strange sensations that sometimes creep unawares into one's very flesh and blood.

At last the tramp spoke:

"Well, don't you know me?" he said.

With the greatest surprise the priest replied:

"Why, no, not at all. I do not know you."

"Ah! you don't know me? Look at me again."

"I can look at you all I please, but I never saw you before."

"You've spoken a true word," retorted the man sarcastically, "but let me show you some one you know better."

He clapped his hat on his head and unbuttoned his overcoat. His bare chest showed beneath it. A red sash tied around his thin loins kept his trousers in place. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out an envelope, one of those nondescript envelopes covered with stains that tramps carry about their persons and into which they put the various legitimate or ill-gotten documents that secure their freedom from over-zealous gendarmes. He pulled out a photograph about the size of a letter, yellow, worn and faded by the continual contact of his flesh.

Then, holding it up beside his face, he asked:

"And that face, do you know it?"

Father Vilbois advanced a step to get a better view and then started back in bewilderment. It was his own likeness, that he had made for *her,* years and years ago.

He made no reply, being at loss to understand the meaning of the scene. The tramp repeated:

"Do you recognize this picture?"

And the priest stammered:

"Why, yes."

"Who is it?"

"It is I."

"Is it really you?

"Yes."

"Well, now look at the picture and then at me."

Already the wretched man had seen the resemblance between the two beings, the one in the photograph and the laughing creature that held it close to his face, had discovered the startling likeness, yet he could not grasp the meaning of it and stammered:

"Well, what is it you want of me?"

In an ugly voice the tramp replied:

"First I want you to recognize me."

"Well, who are you?" demanded the abbé.

"Who am I? Ask anybody in the street, ask your cook, let's go and ask the mayor of the place, if you like, and show him this photograph: and I tell you he'll laugh. Ah! papa curé, you won't acknowledge that I'm your son, eh?"

Then the old man, lifting his hands high above his head in a biblical gesture, moaned:

"It cannot be true."

The young fellow came close to him.

"Ah! it cannot be true? Ah! Father, you must stop lying, do you hear?"

He assumed a threatening expression, clenched his fists and spoke with such violent conviction that the

priest backed away and wondered which one of the two was mistaken.

However, he reiterated:

"I never had any children."

The other man retorted:

"And never a mistress, I suppose?"

The old man resolutely uttered one word, a proud avowal.

"Yes."

"And that mistress was not with child when you threw her out?"

Suddenly the old anger which had been choked back twenty-five years ago, which had been choked back, but not forgotten, burst through the wall of faith and resignation and abnegation that Father Vilbois had built around it and, beside himself with rage, the old man shouted:

"I threw her out because she had deceived me, because she was carrying another man's child. Had it not been for that, I would have killed her, monsieur, and killed you at the same time."

The young fellow hesitated, surprised at the sincerity of the outburst and then he said gently:

"Who told you that it was another man's child?"

"Why, she told me so herself, and braved me."

Then the tramp, without disputing the word of the older man, concluded in an indifferent voice:

"Oh! well, mother made a mistake in telling you this, that's all."

Mastering himself also, the abbé in turn inquired:

"And who told you that you were my son?"

"She did, on her death-bed, m'sieu le curé — And

then, this! —" And he again held the little photograph up to the priest.

The old man took it from him and slowly, carefully, with a heart bursting with anguish, compared this unknown man with his old picture. Then he doubted no more; this stranger was really his son.

A terrible depression overwhelmed him, like the remorse of an old crime. He understood a little, guessed the rest and lived over the brutal scene of the separation. It was to save her life from her maddened lover, that the deceitful woman had lied. And the lie had won. And a son of his had been born into the world and had grown into this sordid tramp who smelled of vice like a he-goat smells of the barn.

He murmured:

"Will you take a little walk with me, so that we may come to an understanding?"

"Well, I guess so, that's why I came," replied the man.

They strolled side by side through the olive-grove. The sun had gone down. The coolness of Southern evenings spread a chilly mantle over the country. The abbé shivered and, raising his eyes with the habitual motion of the priest, he noticed everywhere about him the tiny gray leaves of the sacred tree that had sheltered the Greatest Sorrow and Only Weakness of the Saviour of man.

A prayer gushed from his heart, short and despairing, uttered by the inward voice that never passes the lips and with which believers implore Christ: "Oh! Lord, help your servant."

Then, turning to his son:

"So your mother is dead?" he said.

A new sorrow rose within him as he uttered these words: "Your mother is dead," a strange sensation of distress, peculiar to the man who never forgets the ties of the flesh; it was like an echo of the past torture he had suffered. Only it was even worse, for now she was dead and nothing remained of the short and delicious bliss of the past but the deep wound in his heart.

The young fellow replied:

"Yes, monsieur le curé, my mother is dead."

"Has she been dead long?"

"Yes, she died three years ago."

A new doubt came over the priest.

"Then why did you not seek me sooner?" he asked.

The man hesitated.

"I couldn't. There were things that prevented me. But, excuse me for interrupting these reminiscences, I'll be as explicit as you wish later on; I want to tell you that I haven't eaten anything since yesterday morning."

A great wave of pity swept over the old man, and he stretched out both hands to the tramp.

"My poor child," said he.

The young fellow's slim, hot fingers closed over the great hands that the priest held out to him.

Then he replied in the sarcastic tone that hardly ever left him:

"Well, well, I'm beginning to think that we shall get along very well together."

The priest started toward the bungalow.

"We'll go in and have dinner," he said.

He suddenly thought with childish delight of the fine fish he had caught that afternoon and which, with the chicken and rice, would make a good meal for the wretched young fellow that day.

The cook, anxious and surly, was waiting at the door.

"Marguerite," cried Father Vilbois, "take the table and carry it into the bungalow, quick, and set another place, quick, I say."

The servant stared at her master dubiously when she understood that he intended to sit down to a meal with the tramp. Seeing this, Father Vilbois removed the table himself and carried it into the only room of the bungalow.

A few minutes later he was sitting opposite the vagabond, before a tureen of cabbage soup that sent up a cloud of fragrant steam.

III

After the plates had been filled, the tramp fell to voraciously.

The priest had lost his appetite and only sipped the fragrant broth, leaving the bread in the bottom of the plate.

All at once he spoke:

"What is your name?"

The man laughed. He was glad to be able to satisfy the demands of his stomach.

"Father unknown," he said, "no other name than my mother's maiden name, which, of course, you recall. On the other hand, I have two Christian names that don't seem to fit me very well—'Philippe-Auguste.'"

The priest paled and in a strangled voice demanded:

"Why were you given those names?"

The tramp shrugged his shoulders.

"I should think you could guess. After mother left you, she tried to make your rival believe that he was my

father, and he did believe it until I was about fifteen years old. Then, I began to look a great deal like you, and the old rascal disowned me. They had named me 'Philippe-Auguste,' and if I'd had the luck to look like no one or to have been the son of a third party, to-day I would be the Viscount Philippe-Auguste de Pravallon, legitimized son of Senator Count de Pravallon. I have christened myself, 'No luck.'"

"How do you happen to know all this?"

"Because it was all discussed in my presence. Ah! those things teach you what life is!"

Something more painful and distressing than all he had so far experienced, now oppressed the priest. It was a sort of choking sensation that was growing and growing and that would end by killing him, he thought. It did not come so much from the things he heard, as from the manner in which they were told and the criminal face that uttered them.

Between himself and this man, between his son and himself, he now felt a cesspool of moral iniquities which, for certain souls, are equal to a deadly poison. Was this his son? He could hardly believe it. He wanted all of the proofs, every one of them; he wanted to hear, to learn, to suffer all. He thought for the second time of the olive-grove that surrounded his bungalow and sent up a short supplication:

"Oh, Lord, help your servant."

Philippe-Auguste had finished his soup. He questioned:

"Aren't you going to eat, abbé?"

As the kitchen was away from the bungalow, in a little annex, and as Marguerite could not hear her curé's voice, the latter was in the habit of summoning her by a

few taps struck on a Chinese gong hung on the wall. He grasped the leather hammer and knocked several times on the metal disc. A sound, weak at first, but which grew in volume until it became a shrill, horrible cry of distress, rose from the metal gong.

The servant appeared. She wore a surly expression and threw poisoned glances at the "mafouatan" as if her wonderful instinct of a faithful retainer had warned her of the tragedy that had befallen her master.

In her hands she held a platter on which was the broiled cat-fish, that gave forth a delicious fragrance. Father Vilbois, with a delicate stroke of the spoon, halved the fish from head to tail and offered the savory upper part to the child of his youth.

"I caught it a little while ago," he said, with a touch of pride in his voice, in spite of his great distress.

Marguerite remained rooted to the spot.

The priest continued:

"Bring me some wine, some of the good kind, the white wine of 'cap Corse.'" She almost rebelled and he had to assume a stern expression and repeat: "Go now, and bring two bottles." For, when he offered anyone wine, a rare pleasure for him, he always offered himself a bottle, too.

Radiant, Philippe-Auguste murmured:

"My! a fine idea! I haven't had a meal like this in a long time."

In a few minutes the servant returned.

To Father Vilbois they seemed an eternity, for he was consumed with a desire to know all, that burned him like hell-fire.

The bottles were uncorked, but still the woman remained in the room with her eyes glued on the stranger.

"Leave us," commanded the priest.

She made believe she had not heard.

"I told you to leave us," repeated Father Vilbois sternly.

Only then did she go out.

Philippe-Auguste devoured his fish voraciously and his father watched him narrowly, more and more surprised and distressed at all the baseness he discovered in that face that so greatly resembled his own. The morsels of food that the priest conveyed to his lips remained in his mouth, for his contracted throat would not admit them, and he chewed them over and over, the while he racked his brain for the question he wanted answered the quickest. He ended by asking:

"What did she die of?"

"Consumption."

"Was she ill a long time?"

"About a year and a half."

"How did she contract it?"

"We never knew."

Both men paused. The abbé was thinking. So many things worried him, there were so many questions he wanted to ask. Since the day of their rupture, when he had tried to kill her, he had heard not a word. He had not wanted to know, for he had made up his mind to forget her and the days of his happiness; but now he experienced a jealous desire, almost a lover's eagerness to hear all.

He continued:

"She was not alone, was she?"

"No, she lived with him."

The old man gave a start.

"With him! With Pravallon?"

"Why, yes."

And the man who had been deceived calculated that the woman who had proved faithless to him, had lived more than thirty years with his rival.

Almost without knowing what he was saying, he stammered:

"And were they happy?"

The young man snickered and replied:

"Oh! yes, with ups and downs. All would have been lovely without me. I always spoiled everything."

"How, and why?" questioned the priest.

"I've already told you. Because, up to the age of fifteen, he thought that I was his son. But the old man wasn't a fool and he soon discovered the likeness. Then came the scenes. I used to listen behind the door. He accused mother of having hoodwinked him. Mother would reply: 'Was it my fault? You knew very well when you took me that I was that other man's mistress.' That other man was you."

"Ah! so they spoke of me sometimes?"

"Yes, but never before me, excepting toward the very end, when mother knew she was doomed. They distrusted me, you see."

"And you learned at an early age, that your mother was in an irregular situation?"

"Of course, I'm not a dunce and never was one. You can't help knowing those things."

Philippe-Auguste filled his glass again and again and his eyes began to sparkle, for his long fast made the wine act rapidly.

The priest noticed it and was about to check him, when the thought that a drunken man is loquacious and

out-spoken crossed his mind. He lifted the bottle and filled the young man's glass to the brim.

Marguerite entered with the chicken. Having put the platter on the table, she riveted her eyes on the tramp and exclaimed in an indignant voice:

"Why, he's drunk, monsieur le curé!"

"Oh! leave us alone," said the priest, "and go back to your kitchen."

She slammed the door as she went out.

He resumed:

"And what did your mother say about me?"

"Why, what a woman always says about the man she leaves for another one; that you were hard to get along with and that you would have led her a dreadful life with your ideas."

"Did she say that often?"

"Yes. Sometimes she would try to veil her meaning, but I always guessed it."

"And how were you treated at home?"

"Oh! very well at first and very badly afterwards. When mother realized that I was spoiling her plans, she threw me over."

"How's that?"

"How's that? Why, it's very simple. When I was about sixteen, I did some foolish things and those pigs put me in a reformatory to get rid of me."

He leaned his elbows on the table, rested his face in his hands and, as the wine had completely intoxicated him, he felt a desire to be talkative and boastful.

A smile played around his lips, an almost feminine smile, which the priest recognized. Not only did he recognize the mother's charm in this boy, but he felt it,

that charm which long ago had won and ruined him. The boy now resembled his mother entirely, not so much by his features as by his glance, that was so fascinating and false, and by his smile, that seemed to part his lips in order to give passage to all the moral depravity within. Philippe-Auguste began:

"Ah! ah! ah! What a funny life I led after I came out of the reformatory! Any writer would be glad to pay me for it. Old man Dumas, in his Monte-Christo, never imagined stranger things than what happened to me."

He paused to reflect, with the philosophical gravity of a drunken man, and then he resumed slowly:

"If you want a fellow to turn out right, you must never send him to a reformatory, no matter what he's done, for he makes all sorts of acquaintances there. I did something real funny, only it didn't pan out right.

"I was loafing around with three fellows near the ford of Folac about nine o'clock in the evening; we were all a little drunk. Suddenly we see a wagon with all the occupants sound asleep in it; they were people from Martinon on their way home from town. I grasp the bridle and lead the whole outfit onto the ferryman's boat and then I push it into midstream. Of course, it made a lot of noise and the driver woke up. He had no idea where they were and started to whip up the nag which jumped into the stream. All hands were drowned. My pals told on me, although they laughed fit to break their sides, when they saw me do the trick. Of course, we didn't know it was going to turn out so bad. We only wanted to give the people a bath for a joke, you know. Since then, I've done worse than that, to get even with them, for they shouldn't have put me

away for such a thing. But there's no use in telling the rest. I'll only tell you the last one, 'cause I know it will please you, papa."

Father Vilbois considered his son with terrified eyes and stopped eating.

Philippe-Auguste started to relate his story, but his father interrupted him.

"Not now," said he, "later on."

He turned and struck the gong.

Marguerite appeared instantly.

Her master spoke in such a stern tone that she bowed her head in meek submission.

"Bring in the lamp," he commanded, "and all the things that are still to be served, and then go to your kitchen and do not show yourself again until I ring for you."

She went out soon and returned with a white porcelain lamp covered with a green shade, a large piece of cheese and a dish of fruit. She set the things on the table and went out.

Then Father Vilbois turned to his son and said:

"Now, I'm ready to hear your tale."

Philippe-Auguste quietly filled his plate with dessert and his glass with wine. The second bottle was almost empty, although the priest had not touched a drop.

The young man, with a drunken stutter, resumed:

"Here's the last one. It's a mighty good one, too. I had come home again and I stayed . . . because they were afraid of me — Ah! one mustn't bother me — I'll do anything when I'm bothered — you know they lived together — and yet they really didn't —

"He had two residences, the Senator's residence and

the lover's residence. But he lived with mother more'n he did at home, for he couldn't get along without her. Ah! she was a wise one — mother was — she knew how to hold a man! She had him body and soul and she kept him to the very last. What fools men are! Well, I came back and I dominated them through fear. I know how to get along, I do, and as for strength and smartness, I can hold my own with any man.

"Well, mother sickens and the old man takes her to a fine place near Meulan with a garden as big as a forest. She was sick about a year and a half, as I told you. Then the end came. He used to come out to see her every day from Paris and he was all broken up about her.

"Well, one morning they talked for about an hour and I couldn't imagine what it was all about.

"But suddenly mother called me to her and said:

"'I'm going to die and there's something that I wish to tell you, in spite of the count's advice.' She always called him the 'count.'

"'I will now reveal to you the name of your father, who is still living.'

"I had asked her that about a thousand times — a thousand times — and she always had refused — to tell me — I even remember that I beat her one day to make her talk, but she wouldn't. And then, to get rid of me, she told me that you had died poor, that you weren't much, anyway, a mistake of her youth, etc. She told it so well that I believed every word of it, too.

"So she says to me:

"'I will tell you your father's name.'

"The old man, who was sitting in an armchair, said three times, just like that:

"'It is wrong, it is wrong, it is wrong, Rosette.'

"Mother sat up in bed. I can see her now, with her shining eyes and hectic cheeks, for she loved me all the same, and she retorted:

"'Then do something for him, Philippe!'

"When she addressed him she used to call him Philippe and me 'Auguste.'

"Then he began to shout like a madman:

"'For that good-for-nothing, that jail-bird, that — that — that —"

"And he called me so many names that he must have spent his whole life picking them up.

"I was getting hot, but mother made me keep still, and said:

"'You want him to starve, then, for you know that I haven't a sou.'

"He replied quietly:

"'Rosette, I've given you thirty-five thousand francs a year for thirty years; that amounts to more than a million. Through me you have been rich, cherished, and, I am bold enough to say it, happy. I owe nothing to that fellow who has spoiled our last years and he won't get anything from me. There's no use to harp on it. Tell him the name of his father, if you wish. I regret it, but I wash my hands of it.'

"Then mother turned to me. I was thinking: 'Good — I'm to find my real father at last — if he's got any money, I'm a made man —"

"She continued:

"'Your father, the baron de Vilbois, is to-day Father

Vilbois, curé of Garandou, near Toulon. He was my lover when I left him for this man here.'

"And she told me everything, save the fact that she lied to you. But women, you know, never tell the whole truth."

The tramp was laughing, all unconscious of his depravity. He drained another glass and with a smiling face continued:

"Mother died two — days — later. We followed her remains to the cemetery, he and I — say, wasn't it funny — just he and I — and three servants.

"He cried like a calf all the way — we were side by side — anyone would have thought that we were father and son.

"Then we went back to the house all alone. I was thinking: 'I suppose I'll have to get out; I haven't a sou.' I had just fifty francs in the world. What could I do to get even, I wondered?

"He touched me on the arm and said:

"'I have something to say to you.'

"I followed him into the office. He sits down in front of his desk and begins to tell me that he is not going to be as hard on me as he had let my mother believe; he asks me not to bother you — That, of course, is our business, yours and mine — He offers me a thousand franc note — one thousand — what could a man like me do with a thousand francs? I saw a whole heap of bills in the drawer. The sight of them made me wild. I held out my fist to take the one he offered me, but instead of taking it I rushed at him, knocked him over and gagged him until he almost passed away; then, when I saw that it was almost all over with him, I bound a rag over his mouth and tied his hands. Then

I undressed him, turned him over and — ha! ha! ha! I certainly did avenge you! —"

Philippe-Auguste paused for breath. His mirth had choked him and in the curve of his lips Father Vilbois saw once more the old smile of the woman who had captivated him.

"Then?" said he.

"Then — ha! ha! — There was a blazing grate-fire — it was in December — that mother — died — I took the poker and got it red hot — and then — I made crosses all over his back — I don't remember how many — and then I turned him over and decorated his stomach.

"Say, wasn't it funny, papa? — That's how they used to brand convicts. He wiggled like an eel — but I had gagged him so, he couldn't cry out. Then I grabbed the bills — twelve of them — with mine they made thirteen — an unlucky number. And I left the house, after telling the servants not to bother the count until dinner time, as he wished to sleep.

"I thought he wouldn't squeal and that he would be afraid of the scandal and all that. But I was mistaken.

"Four days later I was pinched in a restaurant. I got three years. That's why I wasn't able to look you up sooner."

He lifted his glass to his lips again, and stuttering so that the words were hardly intelligible he said:

"Now — papa — papa curé! Isn't it funny to have a curé for one's papa! — ah! ah! you must be nice to me, 'cause I'm not like the common ruck — and I fixed the old man — for you —"

The same anger which, years ago, had maddened

Father Vilbois against his faithless mistress, now filled him at the sight of this abominable wretch. He who so often, in the name of the Lord, had pardoned the infamous secrets whispered in confession, felt pitiless now. And he no longer implored the merciful Lord, for he understood that no heavenly or earthly protection can save those upon whom such terrible misfortune falls.

All the ardor of his passionate heart and violent temperament, subdued by years of religious fervor, now rose against this wretched son of his, against the latter's resemblance to himself and to the debased mother who had made him like unto herself, and also against Fate, which had fastened this criminal to his paternal foot, like the ball of a galley-slave.

He foresaw everything with sudden clearness. He had been rudely awakened from his pious dreams.

Convinced that he would have to act energetically in order to be feared by this wretch, he clenched his teeth in fury and, forgetting the drunken condition of the man, said:

"Now, that you've told me all, I want you to listen to me. You will leave here to-morrow morning. You will live in a country which I will indicate to you and I will give you a little income that will keep you from starvation. It won't be much, for I haven't any money. If you disobey a single time, I'll be through with you and I'll see —"

Although in a stupor, Philippe-Auguste sensed the threat and the criminal instincts within him were suddenly roused. Between hiccoughs he spit out these words:

"Ah! papa — be careful now — you're a curé —

I've got a hold on you — and you'll do well to go easy, like the rest!"

Father Vilbois started. And his whole powerful frame trembled with a wild desire to grapple with that monstrous being and break him like a reed. Shaking the table till the dishes rattled on it, he shouted:

"Ah! look out, look out — I'm not afraid of any one — you know —"

The drunken man lost his balance and almost fell to the floor. Feeling that he was about to fall and that he was in the priest's power, with a murderous look he stretched out his hand to grasp a knife on the table.

Father Vilbois saw the gesture and gave the table such a jolt that his son toppled over and fell prone on his back. The lamp rolled to the floor and went out. Complete darkness enveloped them so suddenly that it petrified them like some dreadful event.

The drunkard, crouching by the wall, remained motionless; and the priest sat on his chair surrounded by the blackness of night.

The dark veil that had spread over the room changed his fury into calm and other ideas, as somber and horrifying as the night, came into his mind.

Silence prevailed, the silence of the tomb, where nothing lives nor breathes. Not a sound came from outdoors, not even the soughing of the wind in the trees nor the distant barking of a shepherd dog.

This lasted a long, long time, perhaps an hour. Then, all of a sudden, the gong sounded. It gave forth one sharp, hard ring, which was followed by a loud noise like a body falling to the ground and dragging a chair with it.

Marguerite, who was on the lookout, rushed from

the kitchen, but as soon as she opened the door she started back in alarm at the darkness. With trembling voice and palsied limbs, she called softly:

"M'sieu le curé, m' sieu le curé!"

No answer, not a sound.

"Mon Dieu, mon Dieu," thought she, "what has happened, what have they done?"

She dared not advance into the room, she dared not go back into the kitchen for a light, and a mad desire to run away and shriek took possession of her, although she felt as though she could not move a muscle.

"M'sieu le curé, m'sieu le curé, it's I, Marguerite," she kept repeating.

But suddenly, in spite of her terror, an instinctive desire to help her master overwhelmed her and she rushed back to the kitchen to get a candle. When she returned, she stopped in the doorway. She first caught sight of the tramp lying near the wall, asleep or feigning sleep; then she saw the broken lamp, and then, under the table, the feet of Father Vilbois, who had evidently fallen on his back after striking the gong with his head.

Trembling with fear, her body shaken by convulsive spasms, Marguerite kept saying:

"Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, what is it?"

And cautiously advancing into the room, she suddenly slipped on something slimy.

She stooped and saw that the floor was red and that a dark fluid was running over it toward the door. She guessed that it was blood.

In abject terror she fled from the room, throwing away her candle as she ran.

She opened the front door and flew screaming from

the house, in the direction of the village. She ran as fast as she could go, stumbling against the trees and filling the night with her terrified cries. Her shrill voice rang through the darkness like the sinister cry of the night-owl: "The mafouatan — the mafouatan — the mafouatan —"

When she reached the first village houses, some frightened men ran out and surrounded her, but she was unable to tell them anything, for she had completely lost her head.

Finally they realized that something had befallen the Father and a little troop of armed men started out toward the bungalow.

The little pink structure in the middle of the olive-grove had become a part of the surrounding darkness. Since the one gleam of light had been extinguished like an eye, the bungalow was lost in the night and could never have been found, save by the natives of the region.

Soon lights gleamed here and there in the darkness and cast long rays over the dry grass and the gnarled olive-trees, whose trunks looked like infernal monsters. The reflections soon showed a whitish mass hidden in the trees and a few minutes later the low pink wall of the bungalow was reached. Some peasants carrying lanterns and escorted by gendarmes with drawn revolvers, the constable, the mayor and Marguerite, who was supported by two men, for she had collapsed, composed the rescuing party.

When the front door, which stood wide open, was reached, the crowd hesitated. But the brigadier grabbed a lantern and went in, followed by the others. The servant had not lied.

Blood covered the whole floor like a carpet. It had reached the vagabond's resting place and one of his legs and a hand lay in the dark liquid.

The father and son were both sleeping, one, the sleep from which there is no awakening, and the other, the stupefied sleep of the drunkard. The two gendarmes threw themselves on the latter and hand-cuffed him before he had time to realize what was happening. He rubbed his eyes in bewilderment, and when he saw the priest's body he looked terrified and uncomprehending.

" I wonder why he didn't escape? " said the mayor.

" He was too drunk," replied the brigadier.

And everybody was of the same opinion, for it would never have occurred to anyone that Father Vilbois might have taken his own life.

ROGER'S REMEDY

WE were taking a stroll on the boulevards, Roger and I. Suddenly a vender bawled out in our ears:

"Buy a remedy to get rid of your mother-in-law! Buy a remedy!"

I stopped short, and turning to my companion, said:

"There's something which reminds me of a question I've wanted to ask you for some time. What on earth is 'Roger's remedy,' that your wife talks so much about? She jokes about it so amusingly that I believe it must be some sort of a magic drug of which you alone have the secret. Every time anyone speaks in her presence of some young chap who has gone the pace too much, she turns to you and says laughingly:

"'Somebody ought to tell him about Roger's remedy.'

"And the funniest part of all is that you blush to the roots of your hair every time."

Roger replied:

"Yes, and with reason, and if my wife knew what she was talking about, she would keep still, I assure you. But I'll tell you the story, old man. You know that I married a widow with whom I was madly in love. My wife has always been rather broad in her conversation, and before I made her my better-half we often had some spicy chats. Of course, it was perfectly proper, as she was a widow. She was very fond of funny stories and 'risqué' anecdotes. Sins of that kind

aren't very great, anyway. Well, she is audacious and I am rather bashful, you know, and so, before our marriage, she would tease me with all sorts of embarrassing questions and jokes which could not be easily answered.

"Perhaps it was that very audacity which captivated me, for I was head over heels in love with her and she knew it, the little rascal.

"We decided that we would be married without fuss and feathers and that we would forego the honeymoon trip. After the religious ceremony, we would give a luncheon to our witnesses and then would take a tête-à-tête drive and quietly go back for dinner to my apartment in the rue du Helder.

"Well, after the few wedding guests had departed, we got into the carriage and I instructed the coachman to drive us to the Bois de Boulogne. It was the end of June and the weather was delightful.

"As soon as we were all to ourselves she began to laugh.

"'My dear Roger,' said she, 'now's the time to be gallant. Let's see how you'll go about it.'

"I immediately became paralyzed. I took her hand and kissed it and said: 'I love you' once or twice. I even kissed her neck, but the people passing us embarrassed me. She kept teasing me in a bewitching way and saying: 'Well, what next? What comes next? . . . This 'what comes next' almost drove me crazy. It wasn't in broad daylight, in a carriage in the Bois de Boulogne, that I could — you understand me.

"She saw my embarrassment and thought it screamingly funny.

"From time to time she would remark:

" 'I'm afraid I've made a dreadful mistake. You really worry me.'

" I, too, was beginning to worry. When anyone embarrasses me I'm absolutely good for nothing.

" During dinner she was charming. I sent my man away so that we might be more perfectly at ease. Oh! we were quite proper, of course, but you know how silly lovers are! We drank out of the same glass and ate from the same plate and with the same fork. We amused ourselves by nibbling wafers at both ends so that our lips would meet in the middle.

" She remarked:

" 'I would like a little champagne.'

" I had forgotten all about it. The cooler stood on the sideboard. I clutched the bottle, broke the wire and pressed the cork. But the cork wouldn't come out. Gabrielle began to smile.

" 'A bad omen,' she murmured.

" I pressed my thumb to the cork once more and pushed it to one side and then to the other, but without the least result. And all of a sudden, I broke it off at the neck of the bottle.

" 'Poor Roger,' sighed Gabrielle.

" I took a corkscrew and dug it into the remainder of the cork. Then I pulled and pulled, but the old thing refused to move! I was compelled to call Prosper. By this time my wife was laughing heartily and repeating:

" 'Well — well — well — I see that I can rely on you.'

" She was half intoxicated.

" She was more than three-quarters so after the coffee.

" The wedding-night of a widow differing from that

of a young girl, my wife simply went into our bedroom and said:

" 'Just smoke your cigar for a little while.'

" When I joined her I really lacked confidence in myself. I felt nervous and ill at ease.

" I assumed the place I was entitled to. My wife said nothing. She watched me with a smile on her lips and a visible desire to make fun of me. This irony, at such a time and place, upset me dreadfully and really took the starch out of me.

" When Gabrielle noticed my — plight, she did nothing to help matters; on the contrary, she only remarked with a little indifferent air:

" 'Are you just as clever as this every day?'

" I could not help retorting:

" 'You are a dreadful tease.'

" Then she began to laugh and laugh till she was exhausted.

" Of course I must have cut a most ridiculous figure and I certainly felt like a fool.

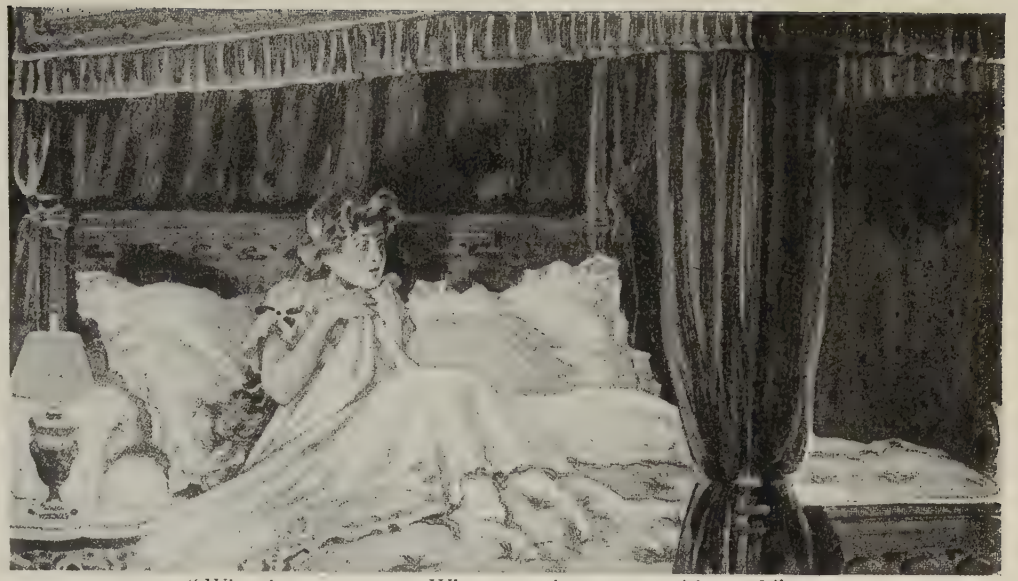
" From time to time she would stop for breath and say:

" 'Just a little courage — and energy — my poor friend.'

" And then she would go off into another fit of hysterical laughter.

" Finally I became so exasperated at myself and at her that I knew I would strike her if I didn't give up the struggle. I leaped out of bed and dressed without saying a word.

" She had quieted down by this time and, realizing that I was angry, she asked:



"Why, here you are. What was the matter with you?"

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"'What on earth are you doing? Where are you going?'

"I made no reply. I left the house. I wanted to murder some one, to get even with the world, to commit some sort of rash act. I was striding along at a great rate, when suddenly the idea to go to a house entered my mind.

"Who knows? It might be a test, an experience, a training. Anyway, it would be a revenge! If ever my wife was to deceive me I would have the satisfaction of knowing that I had forestalled her.

"I did not waver. I knew of a love hostelry close by and I went there like some people who jump into the ocean to see if they have forgotten how to swim.

"I swam, and most satisfactorily, too. And I stayed quite some time, hugely enjoying the idea of my revenge. When I hit the sidewalk again the night was fading into early dawn. I was quite sure of myself now. I felt perfectly satisfied and ready for new acts of valor.

"I walked home slowly and gently opened the door of my room.

"Gabrielle, with her elbow on the pillow, was reading a book. She raised her head and said in a timid voice:

"'Why, here you are. What was the matter with you?'

"I made no reply and triumphantly resumed the place I had abandoned.

"My wife was astounded and ever afterwards believed that I had recourse to some mysterious secret. And now she always refers to 'Roger's remedy' as if it were some infallible scientific process.

"But, alas! that was ten years ago, and to-day that

remedy would not work so well, I fear, with me, anyway.

"But, if you should have a friend who apprehends the emotions of his wedding night, tell him of my remedy and assure him that between the ages of twenty and thirty-five nothing is so sure to be successful."

THE CLOSET

AS we all sat over our after-dinner coffee the conversation drifted to light women, for what else can a lot of men talk about?

One of us remarked:

"A rather strange thing happened to me in regard to this."

And he began his story.

"One evening last winter I experienced one of those awful spells of depression that sometimes take hold of one's body and soul. I was home all alone and knew that if I gave up to the feeling I would have one of those crises of sadness that end in suicide if they repeat themselves too often. I put on my overcoat and went out, without the least idea of what I was going to do. I walked to the boulevards and strolled past the half empty cafés, for it was raining, or rather misting, and the drizzle dampened one's spirit as well as one's clothes. It wasn't one of those good showers that make the passersby seek shelter under doorways, but one of those rains that are so fine that one does not feel the drops, one of those humid rains that deposit tiny beads of moisture on you and soon cover everything with a froth of icy water.

"What could I possibly do to kill time? I walked and walked, trying meanwhile to think of a place where I could spend an hour or two, and discovering for the first time in my life that there is not a place of amusement to go to of an evening, in whole Paris. Finally I

made up my mind to drift into the Folies-Bergères, that amusing market-place of light women.

"There were not many people in the big music-hall. In the long horseshoe promenade were only a few stragglers of small means, whose common extraction was flagrantly depicted by their walk, their clothes, the cut of their hair and beards, their hats, their complexions. Once in a while the eye rested on some well-groomed fellow whose clothes looked as if they belonged to him.

"As for the women, they were the same one always meets there. Awful women, homely, fagged out and flabby, walking about with the look of the hunter in their eyes and a ridiculous expression of haughty contempt on their faces. I wonder why they always wear that silly expression? I was thinking that not one of those flabby creatures, puffy in some places and emaciated in others, with big stomachs and thin legs, was worth the louis she has a hard time getting, after she has asked five.

"But suddenly I saw a little woman who looked really nice and attractive. She wasn't exactly youthful, but she seemed fresh and piquant. I stopped her and, in a foolish way, without a thought, made my price for the night. I did not want to go back to my lonely abode and preferred the company and embrace of this jade.

"So I followed her. She lived in a great big house in the rue des Martyrs. The gas was out in the hall when we arrived. I walked up the stairs slowly, guided by the swish of her skirts and lighting matches as I went. I stumbled many times on the rickety steps and inwardly cursed my foolishness.

"She stopped on the fourth floor and after she had

closed the front door behind us, she turned to me and asked:

" 'So you're going to stay with me all night?'

" 'Why, yes,' I replied, 'that was the agreement, wasn't it?'

" 'It's all right, dear. I only wanted to know. Just wait here, I'll be back in a minute.'

" And she left me standing in the dark.

" I heard her shut two doors and thought I distinguished the sound of voices. This surprised and worried me. The idea of a bully crossed my mind. But, as I have a strong right arm, I thought to myself: 'Well, let come what may.'

" I listened with the greatest attention.

" Somebody was moving about on tiptoe and with infinite precautions. Another door opened and I thought again that I heard a whispered conversation. Presently she reëntered the room with a candle in her hand.

" 'Come in,' she said.

" This speech meant taking possession of the premises for the time being. I went in, and passing through a dining-room that only existed for show, I entered into a bedroom that differed in no way from the usual room of that sort, a bedroom with repp curtains and a silk counterpane that bore several suspicious stains.

" She continued:

" 'Make yourself comfortable, dear.'

" I eyed the room doubtfully, but discovered nothing unusual about it. She disrobed so quickly that she was in bed before I had time to remove my overcoat. She laughed:

"'Why, what's the matter with you? Have you been changed into a pillar of salt? Hurry up.'

"I imitated her alacrity and soon joined her.

"Five minutes later I was crazy to get out of that bed and go home. But the overpowering sensation of depression and lassitude that had overtaken me earlier in the evening, robbed me of all energy to get up, in spite of the keen disgust I felt for this public bed. The sensual spell which this woman had cast over me, beneath the glare of the music-hall lights, vanished in my arms and nothing remained save the vulgar courtesan, similar to all her sisters and whose kisses smelled of garlic.

"I began to talk to her.

"'Have you been here long?' I asked.

"'Six months last January,' she replied.

"'Where did you live before?'

"'In the rue Clauzel. But I left there because the janitress was mean to me.'

"And she started to tell me a long story about how the janitress had gossiped about her.

"But, all of a sudden, I heard a noise near the head of the bed. First it was a sigh and then a distinct sound, like someone moving on a chair.

"I sat bolt upright in bed and asked:

"'What's that noise?'

"With perfect calm she replied:

"'Don't worry, dear, it's the woman in the next flat. The walls are so thin you can hear everything. What rotten houses these are. They're made of paper.'

"My inertia was so strong that I slid back under the bed-clothes; and we resumed our conversation.

"Worried by the foolish curiosity that impels us men to question these women about their first false step, to

lift the veil on their first mistake, as if we wished to find a distant trace of innocence, whereby we might love them in the recollection of their past modesty and candor, I pressed her with questions regarding her first lovers.

"I knew that she would lie to me. But what did it matter? Among all her lies I might discover something touching and true.

"'Now, tell me who he was,' I demanded.

"'He was a boating-man, dear.'

"'Ah! Tell me about it. Where were you?'

"'I was at Argenteuil.'

"'What were you doing there?'

"'I was a waitress in a restaurant.'

"'What restaurant?'

"'At the "Sweet Water Sailor." Do you know it?'

"'Why yes, Bonafan's the proprietor.'

"'Yes, that's it.'

"'And how did the boating-man court you?'

"'While I was making his bed. He got the best of me.'

"But I suddenly recalled to mind the theory of a friend of mine, a physician, who was at the same time a philosopher and an observer, and whose work in a large hospital brought him in daily contact with ill-famed women and ruined girls, with all the misery and shame to which womankind is subjected by men who have money to spend.

"'Always,' he had said to me, 'always a girl is ruined by a man of her own class in life. I've volumes of observations on the subject. People accuse the rich of gathering the flower of innocence of poor young

girls. It is not true. The rich play second fiddle to the others and if they gather any flower at all, it's only the second efflorescence.'

"So, turning to my companion, I began to laugh.

"'Oh! I know your story. The boating-man wasn't the first one.'

"'Oh, yes, I swear he was, dear.'

"'You are lying. Tell me everything.'

"She seemed astonished and hesitated.

"I continued:

"'I'm something of a sorcerer, fair one; I'm a somnambulist. If you do not tell me the truth, I'll put you to sleep and make you give up your secret.'

"She was scared, for she was stupid, as all women of that kind are.

"'How did you guess?' she stammered.

"'Go ahead now,' I retorted.

"'Oh, the first time was hardly anything. It was at the country fair. The restaurant-keeper had engaged an extra "chef," M. Alexandre. As soon as he arrived he turned the place upside down. He ordered every one around from the boss to the kitchen-maid, as if he were a king — He was a big, fine-looking man, who couldn't keep quiet a minute and who kept yelling all the time: "Bring me some eggs, some butter, some madeira!" And we had to bring the things on the run, too, or he'd say things that made us blush under our very skirts.

"'After the day's work was done, he sat down and smoked his pipe in front of the door. And as I was passing with a whole lot of dishes he called to me and said: "Come on, kid, walk down to the river with me and show me the place, will you?"'

" 'I, like a fool, went with him, and hardly had we reached the river before he got the best of me. It all happened so quickly that I didn't know what he was doing. He left by the nine o'clock train that night and I never saw him again.'

" 'Was that all?' I asked.

" 'Oh!' she stammered, 'I really think he's the father of Florentin!'

" 'Who's Florentin?' said I.

" 'He's my boy,' she replied.

" 'Ah! I see. And you made the boating-man believe that he was his father, I suppose?'

" 'Why, certainly!'

" 'Did the boating-man have money?'

" 'Yes, he settled an income of three hundred francs on Florentin.'

" I was beginning to enjoy myself. I continued:

" 'That's all very nice, my dear; you girls aren't as stupid as we think you are. And how old is Florentin now, pray?'

" 'He'll soon be twelve,' she replied, 'and is going to be confirmed next spring.'

" 'That's fine. And ever since that time, I dare say, you've practiced your profession conscientiously?'

" She sighed and muttered:

" 'One does what one can —'

" But suddenly a loud noise in the room made me leap out of bed. It was as if somebody had fallen and was trying to scramble to his feet again by holding to the wall.

" I had clutched the candle and was looking around the room in anger and bewilderment. I listened breathlessly but all was still again.

"She had gotten out of bed, too, and she tried to persuade me to return, by whispering:

"'It's nothing, dear, nothing at all!'

"But I had at last discovered from whence came the noise.

"I walked straight to a door at the head of the bed, opened it — and caught sight of a wretched little boy sitting beside a big chair, from which he had just fallen. The little fellow stared at me with big, frightened eyes, and opening his arms to his mother, began to whimper:

"'It wasn't my fault, mama; it wasn't my fault. I went to sleep and fell off. Don't scold me, mama, it wasn't my fault!'

"I turned to the woman and said:

"'What does this mean, pray?'

"She was distressed and embarrassed. In a strangled voice she replied:

"'Well, what can you expect? I don't make enough to board him away from home! I'm forced to keep him with me and I guess I don't make enough to pay for a separate room for him. He sleeps with me when I'm alone. When a visitor comes for an hour or two, I put him in the closet and he keeps quiet; he knows. But when a man stays all night, like you, it hurts his back, poor child, to sit on a straight chair 'till morning. — I'd just like to see you. How'd you like to sleep on a chair all night? I guess you wouldn't like it much, either!'

"Her voice was raised to an angry pitch.

"The little fellow continued to sob. He was a poor, miserable, little waif, the very child of the closet, of the cold, dark closet, the child that, from time to time,

crept into the maternal bed when it was empty of visitors, to warm his little body.

"I felt like crying myself, and I spent the rest of the night in my own bed."

THE STORY OF A DOG

MME. LEFEVRE was a country lady, a widow, half peasant, who wore ribbon bows and feathers on her hats. She was one of those persons who assume airs in public and mask their sordid souls under comical and pretentious exteriors, just as they conceal their coarse, red hands in écru silk gloves.

She had a servant named Rose, a simple, rural soul.

The two women lived in a little green-shuttered house on a lonely road in Normandy, in the very heart of the Caux region.

As they owned a little plot of ground in front of the house, they raised a few vegetables.

One night, some marauder got into the garden and made away with a dozen onions.

As soon as Rose discovered the theft, she called "madame," who came down in her cotton petticoat.

Great astonishment and horror prevailed. Someone had actually robbed Mme. Lefèvre! So thieves were abroad! They would surely come again! And the two frightened women looked in bewilderment at the footprints in the onion-patch and made a thousand conjectures: "See, they passed here! There are footprints on the wall; they jumped into the flower-bed, too."

And they thought with dread of the future. How would they ever be able to sleep quietly now?

The news of the theft soon spread through the neighborhood. People began to drop in to discuss the event.

Each newcomer had to listen to the voluble observations and ideas of both women.

A farmer who lived nearby, made the following suggestion:

"You ought to have a dog."

There, that was true, they ought to have a dog, if it were only to give the alarm! Heavens! Not a big dog! What would they do with a big dog? His keep would ruin them. But a little one, a little snappy one.

As soon as the last neighbor departed, Mme. Lefèvre discussed the idea of having a dog. After thinking the matter over, she found a good many objections to the plan. She was horrified at the thought of a bowl of food for the dog every day, for she belonged to the race of miserly rural ladies who carry centimes in their pockets for the ostensible purpose of giving alms to the roadside beggars and swelling the contribution in church every Sunday. But Rose, who loved animals, brought forth her reasons and defended them with much skill. So it was decided that they would keep a dog, a very small canine.

The search for a suitable dog began forthwith. No desirable animal could be found, however, for there were nothing but large dogs in the entire region, dogs that consumed an enormous amount of food.

The grocer of Rolleville owned a small one, but he wanted four francs for it, to cover the expense of raising it.

Mme. Lefèvre declared that she was willing to feed a dog, but that she would never buy one.

But the baker, who was familiar with the situation, one morning brought in his wagon a strange-looking little yellow cur, with stubby legs and a long body, a

pointed face and a big curly tail, almost as large as the entire dog. One of his customers was trying to get rid of it, he explained. Mme. Lefèvre thought that this hideous specimen of dogdom was beautiful, because it cost nothing. Rose kissed it and inquired its name. The baker replied: "Pierrot."

He was housed in a large soap box and Rose offered him a bowl of water. He lapped it. Then they gave him a crust of bread. He ate it.

Mme. Lefèvre, who was watching the proceedings askance, thought to herself: "When he gets used to the place, I will let him run around loose, so's he can pick up his food in the village."

They soon gave him his liberty, but this fact did not prevent him from being famished.

Besides, he never barked, excepting to ask for his dinner; but then he would bark unceasingly.

Anyone could get into the garden. Pierrot would trot over and fawn before each newcomer, but he would never utter a sound.

Notwithstanding this, Mme. Lefèvre had become accustomed to him. She even began to like him and to feed him at meal times with pieces of bread dipped in the gravy on her plate.

But she had never given a thought to the tax on dogs and when a man presented himself and demanded eight francs — yes, eight francs, madame — for that little measly cur, that didn't even bark, she almost fainted away.

She made up her mind on the spot to get rid of Pierrot.

All the neighbors for miles around refused to take him. Then they determined, for the lack of any other

means of getting rid of him, to take him to the marl-pit. In the middle of a large plain, was a sort of hut, or rather a thatched roof placed on the ground. It was the entrance to the marl-pit. A well, twenty feet deep, was dug under the roof and terminated in a series of long mine drifts.

Once every year, men went down into this quarry, when it was time to marl the soil. All the year round it was used as a sort of pound for stray dogs and every once in a while, when a person passed the pit, he heard plaintive wails or desperate, furious barks and lamentable calls, issuing from the subterranean prison.

The hunting and shepherd dogs ran madly from this haunted pit and if you leaned over it, you were immediately assailed by a terrible odor of putrefaction.

Horrible dramas took place in its depths.

Sometimes, after an animal had been there for ten or twelve days and was exhausted and near death, his only food having been his predecessors in the pit, a larger, stronger and fresher animal was lowered into it. There they stood, famished, with shining eyes. They watched each other, hesitating and eager. But hunger egged them on; they battled a long time and then the stronger dog would overcome the weaker one and devour him.

When they determined to throw Pierrot into the marl-pit, they looked around for an executioner.

The man who broke stones on the road demanded fifty centimes for his trouble; the sum was absurdly exaggerated, thought Mme. Lefèvre; the neighbor's boy said he would do the job for half that amount; that was also too much; and Rose having remarked that it would be better if they took him themselves, so that he

might escape harsh treatment on the way and an intimation of his awful fate, they decided they would carry him to the pit that very evening.

So they set out across the plain and soon reached the pit. Mme. Lefèvre leaned over it in order to find out if it already contained a tenant — no — no other dog was there; Pierrot, then, would be the sole occupant.

Then Rose, who was crying, gave him a last kiss and dropped him into the hole, and both women leaned over and listened breathlessly.

First they heard a dull thud; then a wail from the wounded animal and finally a series of moans and desperate, pitiful cries.

He barked and barked for liberty!

The women all of a sudden were seized with wild remorse and fear, and they started for home on a run, as if they were possessed. As Rose ran faster than her mistress, the latter kept screaming: "Wait for me, Rose, wait for me!"

But Rose, unheeding, did not stop until she got home.

They spent a dreadful night.

Mme. Lefèvre dreamed that she sat down to dinner, but when she lifted the lid of the soup-tureen, she found Pierrot lying in it. He jumped at her and bit her nose.

She awoke and thought she heard him barking. She listened attentively, but found out that she had been mistaken.

She went to sleep again; but, presently, she dreamed that she was in a long, long road. All of a sudden, she saw a big basket standing in the middle of the road and in her dream she was afraid of it.

Finally, however, she opened the basket and Pierrot, who was concealed therein, leaped out and caught her

hand in his teeth; and she ran down the road screaming, with the dog dangling from her bleeding wrist.

She awoke at dawn, in a terrible state of mind and as soon as she was dressed, rushed off to the pit.

Pierrot was still barking; he had barked all night. Mme. Lefèvre began to sob and call him all the pet names she could think of. And Pierrot answered as best he could in his own language.

She made up her mind to see him at all costs and vowed she would make him happy for the rest of his life.

She went to the man who had charge of the pit and told him her story. He listened without a word. When she had finished, he said:

"You want your dog, do you? It'll be four francs."

Mme. Lefèvre gave a gasp. All her sorrow vanished under the shock: "Four francs! Well, the idea! Four francs!"

He replied: "D'ye think I'm going to get my ropes and pulleys and the whole outfit and take my assistant and go and haul out yer dog for the fun of it? What'd yer throw him in fer?"

She went away boiling over with indignation. Four francs! The idea!

As soon as she got home, she called Rose and told her of the man's demands.

Rose, resigned to anything, said: "Four francs! that's a sum, madame."

Then she added: "Supposing we take the poor thing something to eat, so's he won't starve?"

Mme. Lefèvre approved the idea with delight and so they started off again with a large chunk of buttered bread.

They cut it into small pieces and took turns in throwing it to the dog.

As soon as he finished one piece, he would bark for more.

They went back the next day and the day after, and then every day. But they would make only one trip.

But one morning, just as they were going to throw in the first piece, they heard terrible barking in the pit. Two dogs were there now; some one had thrown in another dog, a big one.

Rose called: "Pierrot!" and Pierrot answered. Then she threw in some bread, but each time a piece landed in the pit, there was a terrific fight and they could hear Pierrot whine pitifully as the other dog attacked him and took away his food.

Although they cried: "It's for you, Pierrot!" it was evident that Pierrot got worsted in the battle.

Nonplussed, the two women looked at each other and Mme. Lefèvre remarked sourly: "I really can't feed all the dogs of the place; I'll have to stop it." And suffocated at the idea of all those dogs living off her, she walked away, munching the bread that had remained in the bottom of the basket.

And poor Rose followed her, wiping her eyes on the corner of her blue apron.

"DO you know what has become of Leremy?"

"He's a captain in the Dragons."

"And Pinson?"

"He's a sub-prefect."

"And Recollet?"

"He's dead."

We tried to recall other names, the owners of which rose before our mind's eye in all their college paraphernalia. Some of these chums we had found in later years, all married and the fathers of families and these chance meetings had always left us a disagreeable impression, as they vividly brought to mind how short life is and how everything passes.

My friend queried:

"And Patience, what has become of Patience?"

I uttered a howl.

"Oh! Patience. Just let me tell you. About four or five years ago, I was inspecting in Limoges and was at the big café on the place du Théâtre, having dinner one evening. I was terribly bored. The business men of the town straggled in by twos and threes, for their "absinthe" or their "vermouth," and talked loudly of their own and their competitors' affairs. Sometimes they laughed uproariously and sometimes they lowered their voices to speak of some delicate or important matter.

"What will I do after dinner?" thought I. And I looked forward with dread to the long evening to be spent in this provincial town. I thought of the walk

through the long, dreary, silent streets, of the terrible sensation of depression that comes over the lonely traveler when he looks about him in a strange place and sees nothing but strange faces and people who are foreign to him by the very cut of their clothes, as well as their local speech and habits. Then there is also the sadness that comes from the different houses and shops, the peculiar carriages, that makes you feel like hurrying on as if you were lost in some dangerous country, and makes you wish you were back in your hotel, in your nasty hotel-room that is full of a thousand odors, where the bed makes you recoil and the wash-basin is filled with dust.

I was thinking of all this and watching the man light the lamps in the street. My sadness was increased by the falling shadows. What was I going to do after dinner? I was alone, all alone, lost in this place.

Presently, a large man sat down at the table next to mine, and bawled in a deep voice:

"Waiter, bring me my bitters!"

The "my" sounded like a thunderclap. I realized at once that everything in life belonged to him, mind you and to no one else, and that he had his own character, by gad, his own appetite, his own trousers, *his own* everything, which belonged to him more absolutely and more completely than anyone else. Then he surveyed the surroundings with a complacent air. When the waiter brought his bitters, he ordered:

"My paper!"

"What paper does he read?" I wondered. Its title would surely reveal to me his opinions, his theories, his hobbies, his little foibles.

The waiter brought "The Times." I was astonished! Why "The Times," a grave, dull, doctrinary organ?

Thought I:

"He must be a real good bourgeois, who leads a methodical, regular life."

He adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses on his nose and lounged back in his seat, but before he opened his paper, he threw a glance around the café. He caught sight of me and began to look at me so intently that I felt embarrassed. I was even going to ask him to explain the reason of his scrutiny when he suddenly bawled:

"Well, upon my word, if it isn't Gontran Lardois."

"Yes, monsieur," said I, "you are quite right."

Then he jumped up and came over to where I was sitting, and held out his hand.

"Well, old man, how do you do?"

I felt very uncomfortable, for I didn't recognize him at all. So I stammered:

"Why — I'm very well — how are you?"

He laughed.

"I bet you don't remember me?"

"No, I really don't — although I think —"

"Well, well," he bawled, slapping me on the shoulder, "I'm Patience, Robert Patience, your college chum."

Then I recognized him. Yes, it was Robert Patience, my college friend. I remembered him now. I shook hands with him.

"And so you're well?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, "I'm feeling fine."

His smile was triumphant.

"What are you doing here?" he inquired.

I told him that I was an inspector of Finances going my rounds. Pointing to the red ribbon in my buttonhole, he said:

"So, you've succeeded, hey?"

"Yes," I said, "I've made my way pretty well, and you?"

"Oh! I've done splendidly, splendidly."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm in business."

"And you're making money, eh?"

"Lots, old man, I'm very wealthy. But come around and have lunch with me to-morrow at noon, 17 rue du Coq-qui-Chante; I'll show you my house."

He paused and seemed to be hesitating.

"Are you still the good fellow of old?" he asked.

"Why — I hope so," said I.

"Not married, are you?"

"No."

"So much the better, then. And you're still fond of fun and all the rest?"

I was beginning to think that he was dreadfully common. Nevertheless, I replied:

"Why, yes."

"And you've still an eye for the girls?"

"I should say so, old man."

He laughed a satisfied laugh.

"Well, well, so much the better. Do you remember our first escapade in Bordeaux, when we had supper at Roupie's? Say, didn't we have a time?"

I should say I did remember the time we had that night, and the recollection of it brought a smile to my lips. Other times came back to me, and we continued this way:

"Say, do you remember the day we shut up the under-teacher in père Latoque's cellar?"

And then Patience roared and struck the table with his fist and related reminiscences after reminiscences.

"Yes — yes. And do you remember the mug the professor of geography, M. Marin, made, when we set off a firecracker just as he was discoursing about the principal volcanoes of our globe?"

Suddenly I inquired:

"Are you married, Patience?"

"I've been married ten years," he bawled, "and I've got four children and wonderful kids they are. But you'll see them to-morrow, and their mother, too."

We were talking at the top of our voices. The other customers of the place turned around in astonishment to look at us.

All of a sudden, my friend pulled out a watch as big as a pumpkin and cried:

"Upon my word, I'm sorry, but I'll have to leave you; I'm busy in the evening."

He rose, took both my hands in his big fists and shook them as if he were going to pull them off.

"To-morrow at twelve," said he.

"Very well," I replied.

I spent the morning working. The Treasurer wanted to retain me for luncheon, but I told him that I had a previous engagement with a friend. As he had to go out, he offered to accompany me.

I asked:

"Can you tell me how to find the rue du Coq-qui-Chante?"

"Yes," he replied, "it's a five-minute walk. As I have nothing special to do, I'll show you the way."

So we started off.

We soon reached the street. It was a wide, pretty thoroughfare near the outskirts of the town. I looked at the houses and soon discovered number 17. It was a large, private house, with a garden in the rear. The front was decorated with Italian frescoes in rather poor taste, I thought. There were a lot of goddesses holding urns and some were draped in nothing but a cloud. Two stone cupids supported a shield on which was carved the house number.

Said I to the Treasurer:

"Here's where I'm going."

And I held out my hand to say good-bye. He made a strange and abrupt motion, but said nothing and shook hands with me.

I rang the bell. A maid appeared.

"Monsieur Patience, please," said I.

"This is the house. Do you wish to see him personally?"

"Why, yes."

The hall was decorated with paintings due to the brush of some local artist. A number of Pauls and Virginias were embracing each other under palm-trees bathed in a pinkish atmosphere. A hideous Oriental lantern hung from the ceiling. There were several doors which were concealed by gaudy portières.

But what impressed me most, was the odor of the place. It was a sickish odor, redolent of rice powder and mould, an undefinable scent floating in a heavy, oppressive atmosphere that reminded me of a Turkish Bath. Following the maid, who led the way, I ascended a marble staircase covered with an imitation

Oriental carpet, and was ushered into a gorgeous parlor.

It was richly furnished, but it showed the inelegant ostentation of a lewd "parvenu." A number of really fine engravings of the past century hung on the walls, representing various half-clad ladies with high, powdered coiffures, being surprised in unconventional attitudes by gallant gentlemen. Another lady, reclining on a much rumpled bed, was playing with a little dog; still another one was gently repulsing the advances of a too enterprising lover. One drawing showed only four feet, the bodies to which they belonged being concealed by a curtain. The large room was surrounded by a downy couch and was saturated with the same odor I had noticed in the hall. Something extremely questionable seemed to emanate from the very walls of the place, from the furniture, the hangings, the exaggerated luxury.

I went over to the window to look out into the garden. It was large and beautifully shady. A broad path wound around a big lawn, in the middle of which played a fountain, and then lost itself in some bushes, only to appear again farther away. And suddenly, way off at the other end of the garden, between a double row of trees, three women appeared. They were walking abreast, with arms linked, and were dressed in loose, filmy morning-gowns. Two of them were blondes and the third one was a brunette. They soon disappeared under the trees. I was astonished and delighted by the charming apparition and it gave rise in me to a whole train of poetical thoughts. These beautiful visions had stayed but a moment in the gorgeous park and had vanished. In an instant rose be-

fore my mind's eye the fair ladies of the past century, wandering about in their wonderful gardens. And my thoughts lingered lovingly on that happy, witty, tender age, when life was so delightful and women's lips so kissable.

A deep voice brought me out of my dream. I turned and caught sight of Patience, who had entered the room and was holding out his hand in welcome, with a radiant smile on his face.

He looked at me for a minute with the sneaky air which usually accompanies the telling of a love secret and then, with a wide and sweeping motion, the very gesture of a Napoleon, he indicated the gorgeous parlor, the garden, the three women walking in it and triumphantly exclaimed:

"And just think that I started with almost nothing — my wife and my sister-in-law."

THE poor people lived precariously on the husband's small salary. Two children had been born to them since their marriage and the original financial difficulties had developed into the shabby-genteel poverty of aristocratic people trying to keep up their position in life.

Hector de Gribelin had been brought up in the provinces, in the ancestral manor, by an old priest. His people were not wealthy, but they managed to keep up appearances.

When he was twenty, his parents looked for a position for him and found one in the Navy Department at a salary of fifteen hundred francs a year.

He had foundered on this reef, like many another man who has not been fitted by early training for the battle of life. He was like all those who look upon existence through a veil, who are ignorant of means and ways and in whom special faculties and iron energy have not been cultivated since childhood.

The three first years in the Navy Department were horrible. He had looked up some friends of his family, old people without money and considerably behind the times, who lived in the dreary, aristocratic streets of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. In this way he had created for himself a small social circle.

Strangers to modern life, humble and proud, these needy aristocrats lived on the upper floors of those old houses. From the ground floor to the top, these apart-

ment houses contained titled families; but money appeared to be as scarce at the top as at the bottom.

Eternal prejudices, the constant preoccupation of rank, the worry to keep up, haunted all these old families, whom the inertia of their male members had brought to ruin. In these surroundings, Hector de Gribelin had met a young girl of noble birth but great poverty and had made her his wife.

They had two children in four years.

During four more years the couple, constantly harassed by financial worries, knew no other distraction than an occasional walk on the Champs-Elysées, on Sundays, and an occasional play during the theater season, thanks to a friend of Hector's, who gave them complimentary tickets.

But, toward the end of Spring, some supplementary work was given de Gribelin by his chief and he received a gratuity of three hundred francs.

When he brought the money home to his wife, he said:

"My dear Henriette, we must get something out of this. Let's take the children to the country for the day."

And, after a lengthy discussion, it was decided that they would go on a picnic.

"Well," cried Hector, "as this doesn't happen every day, I'll hire a carriage for you and the children and I'll take a saddle-horse. The exercise will do me good."

And all the week they spoke of nothing else but the coming picnic.

Every evening, when Hector got home from the Navy Department, he grabbed his eldest son, straddled

him on his knee and jumping him up and down with all his might, would say:

"This is how Papa will look next Sunday, when we go to the country."

And all day long the youngster would drag chairs around the apartment, shouting:

"This is Papa on the horsey."

Even the maid looked at "monsieur" with round eyes when she thought of how he was going to accompany them on horse-back and listened breathlessly when, at mealtimes, he told about his former experiences with horses, at home. Oh! he had had splendid training and when in the saddle, he could subdue any fractious beast.

He would rub his hands and say to his wife:

"I hope they will give me a nervous horse. I'll let you see how I ride, and if you like, we'll come back through the Champs-Elysées, when the crowd is coming home from the Bois. We'll look so well, that I wouldn't mind meeting someone from the Department. A thing like that is quite enough to secure the regard of my chief."

On the appointed day, the saddle-horse and carriage arrived in front of the door together. Hector went down at once to examine his mount. He had had straps put on his trouser-legs and was flicking a crop he had bought the day before.

He raised each one of the horse's legs, patted its neck, its sides, its knees, opened its mouth, examined its teeth, told its age and delivered a practical lecture to his family on the equine in general and the one before him in particular, for he acknowledged that it was a fine specimen.

After everyone had been installed in the carriage, he examined the saddle-straps and, placing his foot in the stirrup, swung himself into the saddle. As soon as the horse felt his weight, it began to prance and almost unseated its rider.

In some excitement, Hector tried to calm it by saying:

"Here now, beauty, here now."

Then, after the horse had quieted down, he turned to his wife and inquired:

"All ready?"

Everyone cried:

"Yes."

"Then, 'en route,'" he shouted.

And the procession moved off.

All eyes were on him. He rode in the English style and exaggerated the rebounds. Hardly did he touch the saddle, before he flew in the air like a ball. Every once in a while he would seem ready to fall and he kept staring straight ahead with a pale, anxious face.

His wife, who was holding one of the children on her lap and the maid, who had charge of the other one, kept saying over and over:

"Watch Papa, watch Papa!"

And the two youngsters, beside themselves with joy, gave vent to piercing shrieks. The horse, frightened by their clamors, started to gallop, and in the effort de Gribelin made to rein him in, he lost his hat. The coachman had to get down from his box to pick it up and when Hector took it from him, he turned to his wife and shouted:

"Do make the children stop screaming, my horse will run away."

They picnicked on the grass, in the forest of Vésinet.

Although the coachman was supposed to take charge of the horses, Hector arose every little while to see that his mount lacked nothing. He patted it on the neck and fed it bread and sugar and cake.

Said he:

"He's a fine trotter. He shook me up a little at the start; but you saw how quickly he got over it; he recognized his master. He won't be unruly again."

They came back by the Champs-Elysées, as they had planned. The broad avenue was filled with carriages and the crowd was so dense on the sidewalks, that it looked like two long black ribbons running from the Arc de Triomphe to the Place de la Concorde. A shower of sunlight fell on the avenue and made the metal on the carriages and harnesses glitter.

A folly of movement, a wonderful agitation, seemed to have taken hold of the people, the horses and the carriages. And in the distance, in a glow of golden light, shone the Obélisque. Hector's horse, after he had passed the Arc de Triomphe, was suddenly seized with fresh ardor and flew past the carriages, bound for the stable, in spite of his rider's frantic efforts.

The family carriage was far behind now. Just as Hector reached the Palais de l'Industrie, the animal, seeing an open field before him, veered to the right and bolted home.

An old, gray-haired woman was slowly crossing the avenue; she was right in the horse's path. Powerless to check his mount, Hector began to shout at the top of his voice:

"Hey, there! Hey! Hey, there!"

She must have been deaf, for she quietly continued

on her way until she was struck by the horse with the force of an engine and hurled ten feet away with her skirts in the air.

Some men cried:

"Arrest him!"

De Gribelin, crazed with fear, was clinging to the horse's mane and yelling:

"Help, help!"

A terrific jolt pitched him head foremost over the ears of his charger and landed him in the arms of a policeman.

In a second, he was surrounded by a furious, gesticulating mob. An old gentleman with a big round decoration and a white mustache, seemed especially exasperated. He kept saying:

"Upon my word, when a man is so awkward he ought to stay home. He shouldn't go out and kill people in the street, when he don't know how to handle a horse."

Presently four men, carrying the old woman, pushed their way through the crowd. She looked as if she were dead, with her blanched face and her bonnet covered with dust.

"Carry this woman into a drugstore," commanded the old gentleman, "and then we'll go to the police station."

Hector was placed between two officers; a third policeman led the horse and a great crowd followed behind.

All of a sudden, the family carriage hove in sight. Mme. de Gribelin jumped out, the maid lost her head and the children began to shriek. Hector explained that he had run down an old woman, but that he would

be right home and implored his wife not to worry. The family was finally persuaded to depart amid great agitation.

At the police station, the explanations were short. Hector gave his name and occupation, and then everybody waited for news of the victim.

A policeman, sent out to investigate, returned with the report that the old woman had regained consciousness, but that she was injured internally. She was a Mme. Simon, sixty-five years old and a general houseworker.

When Hector learned that his victim was alive, he entertained hope and promised to pay any expenses she might incur. Then he hastened to the drugstore.

A crowd stood peering through the windows; the old woman was lying back in a chair with limp hands and a dazed expression on her face. Two physicians were bending over her. No limbs were broken, but they feared internal injuries.

Hector addressed her:

"Are you suffering a great deal?" he asked.

"Oh! yes."

"Where?"

"It feels like I had fire in my stomach."

One of the doctor's stepped forward:

"Are you the one responsible for the accident, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, this woman ought to be sent to a hospital. I know of one where they would take her for six francs a day. Would you care to have me see about it?"

Hector was delighted, thanked the physician and went home much relieved.

He found his wife in tears. He quieted her:

"It's nothing, and in a few days the old lady will be on her feet again; she is already better; I have sent her to a hospital. It's nothing! It's nothing!"

The next day, after office hours, he went to inquire after Mme. Simon. He found her sipping a broth with relish.

"Well?" said he.

"Oh! my good monsieur," she replied, "it's just the same; I'm no better. I feel like I were going to pass away."

The house physician said it would be well to wait a few days, as complications might set in.

Hector waited three days and then called again. The old woman, whose complexion and eyes were clear, began to moan as soon as she saw him:

"I can't move, my good m'sieu, I can't turn at all. I'll be laid up till the end of my days."

A shudder ran through Hector, as he listened. He asked to see the doctor. The latter shrugged his shoulders:

"I'm sure I can't say, monsieur, she yells as soon as we try to lift her. We cannot even move her rolling chair without having her scream unmercifully. I'm compelled to take her word; I'm not inside of her, you know. As long as I have not seen her walk, I have no right to suppose that she is lying."

The old woman listened, motionless, with sly eyes.

A week passed; then two and then four. Mme. Simon had not left her chair. She ate from morning until night and was growing fat. She talked brightly with the other patients and seemed perfectly used to her immobility, as if it were a well-earned rest after her fifty-odd years of toil as a general houseworker.

Hector called every day; every day he found her serene and comfortable and saying:

"I just can't move, my good monsieur, I just can't."

Every evening, Mme. de Gribelin, devoured with anxiety, would inquire:

"And Mme. Simon?"

And each time he would reply with profound discouragement:

"Always the same."

They sent away the maid, whose wages were an expense they could no longer afford. They economized in everything; the entire gratuity was used up.

Then Hector called four doctors to give their opinion on the case. They examined the old woman, felt of her and tested her, the while she watched them with a sly expression.

"We must make her walk," said one of them.

She shrieked:

"I can't, my good messieurs, I can't!"

Then they took hold of her, drew her forcibly out of the chair and dragged her a few feet; but she slipped from their grasp and fell to the floor and screamed so terribly that they lifted her back again with the greatest care.

They emitted a discreet opinion, but concluded that work of any sort was out of the question.

And when Hector brought home the verdict, his wife let herself sink into a chair and stammered:

"It would be better to have her live here, it would cost less."

Hector leaped into the air:

"What! Here in our own home, you mean?"

After this outburst he remained dazed for a moment.

His wife, with tears in her eyes and pitiful resignation, murmured:

"Well, mon ami, I can't help it, it was not my fault!"

MY UNCLE JULES

A POOR old man with a white beard asked us for alms. My friend Joseph Davaranche gave him five francs; this rather surprised me. But he said:

"That wretched man brought to my mind a story the memory of which haunts me continually. I am going to relate it to you.

"My family, we are natives of Hâvre, was not rich, just having enough to get along on. Although my father worked unceasingly, he earned very little.

"My mother suffered a great deal from the privations that surrounded us and often made sharp remarks to my father. The poor man would then make a gesture that distracted me. He would pass his hand over his brow as if to remove a perspiration that did not exist. I felt his great sadness. Never would he reply. We economized in every possible way. We would never accept a dinner, for we were not able to return it. Our provisions were usually bought as bargains, whatever remained over on the stands. My sisters made their own dresses and would have long discussions about a piece of trimming that cost a few centimes per yard. Our daily fare consisted of a good soup and beef, which could be eaten with any kind of gravy. We were told that this was wholesome and strengthening, although personally, I would greatly have preferred a larger variety.

"But every Sunday we took a walk on the pier ar-

rayed in our best clothes. My father, in frock coat, high hat and gloves gave his arm to my mother, who was adorned like a ship on a gala day. My sisters, always ready first, waited for the signal to start, but always, at the last moment, someone would invariably discover a spot on father's frock coat, which would have to be treated with a rag dipped in benzine. My father, with his hat on and in shirt sleeves, would patiently wait until the operation was finished, while my mother would hastily remove her gloves, fearing to spoil them. We departed with ceremony, my sisters going ahead arm in arm. They were marriageable and therefore my parents were anxious to call attention to them. I walked by my mother's left side and my father walked at her right.

"And I well remember the pompous air of my poor parents during those Sunday walks, the rigidity of their features and the severity of their glances. They advanced with a dignified tread, their bodies straight, their legs stiff, as though some important affair depended upon their movements, and every Sunday, when we saw the ships arrive from distant and unknown countries, my father always pronounced the same words: 'Ah! if Jules should be on board one of them, what a surprise it would be!'

"My uncle Jules, my father's brother, was the only hope of the family, after having been its 'bête noire.' I had known of him since my childhood, and I am sure I would have recognized him at sight, having heard him so often described. I knew all the details of his existence, from the day of his departure for America, notwithstanding the fact that one always spoke of that period

of his life in a whisper. It appears that he misconducted himself, that is to say, he squandered some money, which is the greatest crime a member of a poor family can commit. Among the rich, a man who amuses himself 'fait des bêtises.' He is what one laughingly calls a 'noceur.' Among the needy, a boy who jeopardizes the family fortune becomes a good-for-nothing or a rascal. And that distinction is quite just, although the result is the same, for the consequences alone determine the gravity of the act. Well, Uncle Jules had perceptibly diminished the fortune my father had counted upon, after having dissipated every centime of his own portion.

"He was put on board a merchant vessel bound for New York (as one did in those days). After he arrived in America, my uncle Jules established himself as some kind of a merchant, what particular kind we never knew, and he soon wrote that he was making a little money, and hoped ere long to restore to my father a part of the fortune he had lost. That letter caused a profound emotion in the family. Jules, who only a short time before, was a good-for-nothing, suddenly became an honest man, a man with a heart, a real Davaranche, upright like all the Davaranches. A sea-captain also informed us that he had leased a large store and was carrying on an important business.

"A second letter, two years later said:

"'My dear Philippe: I am writing you so as you will not be anxious regarding my health, which is good. I leave to-morrow for a long trip to South America. It may be some years before you hear from me. If I do not write, do not be alarmed. I will return to Hâvre

as soon as I have acquired a fortune. I hope that that may not be too long, and we will then live happily together.'

"That letter had become the gospel of the family. It was read on every occasion and shown to everybody. During ten years, in truth, uncle Jules gave no signs of life, but, as time passed, the hope my father possessed increased, and my mother also often said: 'When that good Jules returns, our position will change. There's a man who understood how to improve his affairs.'

"And every Sunday, when watching the large steamers creeping along the horizon, and vomiting toward the heavens their clouds of smoke, my father repeated his eternal phrase. 'Ah! If Jules should be on board of one, what a surprise!'

"And we really almost expected to see him wave a handkerchief and shout: 'Hello! Philippe.'

"We had planned a thousand things upon his assured return; one of which was to buy with uncle's money a little home in the country near d'Ingouville. I dare not affirm that my father had not already entered into negotiations with the proprietor. At that time, the elder of my sisters was twenty-eight years old, the other twenty-six. There were no prospects of their marrying, which was a great worry to us all. After some time, however, a suitor for my younger sister presented himself. A clerk, not rich, but honorable. I shall always be convinced that uncle Jules' letter, which was read one evening in his presence, put an end to his hesitations and determined him to propose.

"He was accepted with eagerness, and it was decided

that, after the marriage, the entire family should together take a little trip to Jersey.

"Jersey is an ideal voyage for people with small means. It is not at a great distance; you cross the channel in a little steamboat and soon you are on strange soil, for that little island belongs to the English. Consequently, a Frenchman, after two hours of travel, can land among a people who are his close neighbors, and study their manners, which by the by, he probably will find deplorable.

"The trip to Jersey became our sole occupation, our dream of every moment. At last we started. I can see it all as though it happened yesterday, the steamer getting up steam and lying off the pier of Granville; my father, excited, watching the putting on board of our baggage; my mother, restless, leaning on my unmarried sister's arm; the latter appeared lost since the marriage of the other, like a chicken left alone in her nest. Behind us, the bride and groom, who always hung back and caused me often to turn my head in their direction.

"The whistle blew. Here we were on board, and the steamer, leaving the pier, glided upon a sea as smooth as a green marble table. We watched the coasts disappear, happy and proud, as are all those who travel but seldom. Before our departure, my father had had his frock coat cleaned once more of all its spots and now, at every moment, he spread the odor of benzine, which recalled to me our Sunday outings.

"All of a sudden, he saw two pretty women, to whom two men were offering oysters. An old sailor in rags opened the shells with a stroke of his knife, and passed

them to the men, who gave them to the women. They ate them in a most delicate manner, holding the shells in their fine handkerchiefs, and advancing their lips so as not to soil their dresses. Then they would drink the juice with a little rapid movement and throw the shells into the sea. My father without doubt was delighted with the charming manner in which they ate the bivalves on a steamer in motion. He considered it good form, refined, elegant and approached my mother and sisters to ask them:

"'Would you like some oysters?'

"My mother hesitated, on account of the expense; but my sisters immediately accepted. My mother in a most displeased voice, said:

"'I am afraid of making myself ill. Only give a few to the girls, or they will be sea-sick.' Then, turning to me, she said: 'As for Joseph, he does not need any, one must not spoil a boy.'

"I remained by my mother's side, finding such a distinction most unjust. I gazed at my father, who was conducting my sisters and brother-in-law toward the old ragged sailor in a most pompous manner. The two women had left. My father showed my sisters how to handle the oysters without spilling the juice, and, to better demonstrate his meaning, he took one, but in trying to imitate the women, he immediately dropped the oyster, spilling all the liquid on his coat. I heard my mother murmur:

"'It would be better if he kept quiet.' But, all of a sudden, my father appeared anxious; he moved away a few feet, looked intently at his family gathered around the sailor, and then suddenly he approached us. He

looked very pale, and his eyes were strange. He said in a subdued voice to my mother:

" 'It is extraordinary how much that man who opens the oysters looks like Jules.'

" My mother, very much astonished, asked:

" 'What Jules?'

" My father replied:

" 'Why, my brother Jules. If I did not know he had a good position in America, I should say it was he.'

" My mother, extremely shocked, stammered:

" 'You must be crazy! As long as you know it is not he, why talk such nonsense?'

" But my father insisted:

" 'Go look at him, Clarisse. I prefer you to convince yourself with your own eyes.'

" She arose and went to join her daughters. I, too, looked at the man. He was old, dirty, all wrinkled, and did not once look up from his work.

" My mother came back. I saw that she trembled. She pronounced very fast:

" 'I believe it is he. Go ask information from the captain. Above all things, be prudent, to avoid having that creature fall into our arms.'

" My father disappeared and I followed him, strangely moved.

" The captain, a tall, thin man, with long whiskers, was walking up and down the bridge with an important air as though he were commander of an Indian mail-steamer.

" My father approached him with ceremony and payed him some compliments regarding his profession.

"'What was the population of Jersey? What were its products? Its customs? The nature of the soil?' etc., etc., etc. One would have thought that my father was talking of the United States of America. Then they spoke of the steamboat we were on, 'The Express,' then about the crew. At last my father, in a troubled voice, said: 'You have an old man there who opens oysters, and who appears most interesting. Do you know anything about him?'

"The captain, who during the conversation had become irritated, replied dryly:

"'He is an old French vagabond whom I found last year in America and whom I have brought back to his country. It appears he has relations in Hâvre, but he will not go near them, because he owes them money. His name is Jules — Jules Davaranches or Darvanche, something like that. At one time he was rich, but you see what he has come to now.'

"My father, who had become livid, articulated, his throat parched, his eyes haggard: 'Ah! ah! Well, well, that does not astonish me; thank you very much, captain,' and he walked away, while the seaman watched him with astonishment.

"He came back to my mother in such a condition that she said to him:

"'Sit down, we are going to learn something.'

"He threw himself on the seat and stammered: 'It is he, it is certainly he!' Then he asked, 'What are we going to do?'

"She quickly answered:

"'You must take away the girls, for, as Joseph knows all, he will want to tell them, and above all things, our son-in-law must know nothing of the affair.'

"My father seemed stunned. He murmured: 'What a catastrophe!'

"My mother, having become furious, added: 'I always thought that that thief would never be anything and that he would be a burden to us! As though anything else could be expected of a Davaranche!' And my father passed his hand over his forehead, as he always did at my mother's reproaches.

"She said:

"'Give the money to Joseph to pay for the oysters. There is nothing left now but for that beggar to recognize us. That would create a pretty scene on the boat. Let us go to the other end and arrange it so that he will not see us.'

"She arose and after my father had given me five francs they moved away. My sisters, who seemed surprised, were waiting for father. I said: 'Mama had a slight attack of sea-sickness,' and then I turned to the oyster-opener: 'How much do we owe you, sir?'

"I had a desire to add: 'Uncle.'

"He answered:

"'Two francs.'

"'Here,' I said, without looking at him.

"I handed him the five francs and he gave me the change. Then I looked at his hand, wrinkled and thin, and at his miserable, sad face, and, broken-hearted, I said to myself: 'That is my uncle! My father's brother, my uncle!' I gave him a tip of half a franc, for which he thanked me, saying:

"'God bless you, young man!' with the air of a beggar who receives charity. I thought he must have begged in America.

"My sisters were contemplating me, bewildered at

my generosity. When I returned the two francs to my father, my mother, surprised, asked:

"'It is not possible that you ate three francs worth of oysters?'

"In a firm voice I declared that I had given him half a franc as a 'pourboire.' My mother started and, looking me in the eyes, said: 'You are crazy! The idea of giving half a franc to that man, that rascal!'

"She stopped, for she had received a look from my father, which meant: 'Be careful, our son-in-law is near.' After that we were silent.

"Before us, on the horizon, a violet shadow appeared to arise from the sea. It was Jersey. As we approached the pier a violent desire seized my heart to see once more my uncle Jules, to be near him, to say something kind and comforting to him. But, as everybody had finished eating oysters, he had disappeared; without doubt he had descended into the hold of the boat, where the poor old wretch was lodged. On our return trip we took the boat to Saint-Malo to avoid meeting him. My mother was almost wild with fear. I never saw my uncle again.

"And now you know the reason why I sometimes give five francs to a beggar."

THE GOLDEN BRAID

THE walls of the cell were bare and white-washed. A narrow, barred window, placed high in the wall, so that it was of difficult access, lighted the small, gloomy room, and the lunatic, who was sitting on a wooden chair, eyed us steadfastly. He was very thin and had drawn, haggard features and white hair, hair that one felt had grown white in a few months. His clothes seemed to hang on his spare frame and sunken chest and stomach. One could feel that this miserable man was absorbed and ravaged by a thought, like a fruit by the all-conquering worm. His Folly, his Idea, was there, in his head, and it was obstinate, harassing, gnawing. Little by little, It, the Invisible, Impalpable, Immaterial Idea was eating into his flesh, drying up his blood, snuffing out his very life.

What a mystery was this man, whom a Dream was sending to his grave! This Possessed One inspired terror and pity and infinite compassion! What weird dream, fatal and horrible, lived under that brow lined by deep, moving furrows?

Said the physician: "He has terrible furious spells; he's one of the strangest lunatics that has ever come under my observation. He is afflicted with erotic and morbid mania. He's a sort of necrophile. He has written a diary which clearly shows the malady of his mind. His folly becomes almost palpable, so to speak. If you care to, you may look over this strange document."

I followed the doctor into his office and he handed me the diary of the poor, demented wretch.

"Read it," said he, "and then tell me what you think of it."

Here is what was written in the diary:

Until the age of thirty-four I lived quietly, without one love affair. Life seemed very good to me, very simple and very easy. I was wealthy. I liked so many things that I had a passion for none. How good it is to live! Every morning I woke up happy and did the things I liked to do. And I went to bed satisfied, with the hope of the next day and the peaceful future to look forward to.

I had had several mistresses without ever having felt the frenzy of desire, or the ardent love that sometimes comes after possession. It is good to live that way. It is perhaps better to love, but then, love is frightful. And yet, those who love in a commonplace way, must experience great happiness, but not such happiness as mine, for love came to me in the strangest manner.

As I was wealthy, I indulged my taste for antiquities of all sorts; and I often thought of the unknown hands that had touched these things, of the eyes that had admired them, of the hearts that had loved them, for one certainly loves inanimate objects! I often remained hours and hours looking at a little watch of the past century. It was so dainty and pretty, with its enamel and its wrought gold! And it ticked as it did on the day when a woman, captivated by the precious jewel, went into the shop and bought it. This little watch had not stopped going, had never ceased its me-

chanical life nor the tic-tac begun a hundred years ago. Who was the first to wear it under her kerchief, the heart of the watch beating against the heart of the woman? What hand had held it lightly clasped in its tapering fingers, had turned it over and over and wiped the porcelain shepherds tarnished by the moisture of the skin? Whose eyes had scanned its flowered face for the expected, beloved and divine hour?

How I should have liked to have known her, the woman who had owned that rare and exquisite jewel! She is dead! I am possessed by the desire of the women of the past. I love, through the ages, all those who have loved.

The stories of past loves fill me with regret! Oh! beauty, youth, hope and smiles! Should not these be eternal?

How I have wept for whole nights over the poor women of yesterday, so beautiful, so tender, so sweet, whose arms opened to their lovers and who now are dead! Kisses are immortal! They hover from lip to lip, from century to century, from age to age! Mankind gathers them, transmits them and dies.

The past attracts me, the present awes me because the future means death. I regret all things of the past and I weep over all the people who have lived; I would like to stay the hand of Time. But the hours flit by, constantly stealing a little from my lifetime and giving me over to the annihilation of to-morrow. And I will never live again.

But I am not to be pitied. For I found The One I was looking for; and, through her, I tasted heavenly delights.

One bright morning I was loafing around Paris,

happy and light-hearted, looking into all the shop-windows. All of a sudden I noticed a beautiful Italian cabinet of the seventeenth century. It was a rare and beautiful piece of workmanship. I attributed it to a Venetian artist by the name of Vitelli, who was quite celebrated in his time.

I passed on.

Why did the recollection of that cabinet haunt me with such insistence that it made me retrace my steps? I stopped once more in front of the curiosity-shop and felt the temptation to purchase the cabinet.

What a strange thing temptation is! You look at a thing and, little by little, it seduces you, troubles you, takes possession of you as would a woman's face.

Its charm envelopes you, a weird charm, which proceeds from its color, its shape and its own particular physiognomy; and you already love it, desire it, yearn for it. The fever of possession is upon you, weak at first, as if it were timid, but stronger and stronger as time goes on, until it becomes a raging passion.

And the dealers seem to read in your eyes the secret and irresistible longing that is in you.

I bought the cabinet and had it sent home immediately. I had it placed in my bedroom.

Oh! I pity all those who do not know the honeymoon that a collector spends with the antiquity he has purchased. He caresses it with hand and eye as if it were of flesh; he hovers around it continually and never stops thinking of it. Its cherished remembrance follows him about, in the streets, in society, everywhere; and when he comes home, he runs and looks at it before taking off his hat.

Really, for a week I adored that cabinet. I opened

its drawers and its doors, handled it with delight and tasted all the joys of possession.

One night, while I was feeling a panel, I discovered that there was some secret device about the cabinet. My heart began to beat and I spent the whole night trying to solve the mystery.

I succeeded the following day, when I inserted the blade of a knife in a crack of the wood. A board slid back and I saw, lying on black velvet, a marvelous braid of golden hair.

Yes, a big braid of golden hair, almost Titian-colored, that was tied with a gold cord.

I was bewildered and I trembled from head to foot! An almost imperceptible perfume, so old that it seemed the ghost of itself, emanated from the drawer and the weird relic.

I lifted it gently, almost religiously, from its resting-place. It unrolled and touched the floor; it was so thick and brilliant, so light and serpentine, that it looked like the flaming tail of a comet.

A strange emotion clutched my throat. What was this find? When and how had this braid been hidden in that drawer? What adventure or drama was behind this discovery?

Who had cut this hair? Had it been a lover, when parting forever from his mistress? Or a husband animated by a spirit of revenge? Or had it been the fair owner herself, in a fit of despair?

Was she about to enter a convent when she had thrust that treasure into the drawer, to be a sort of token to the living world? Was she, young and fair, to be nailed in her coffin and had her lover kept that glorious adornment, the only thing about her that was

not destined to perish in the earth, the only thing he might worship and caress in his hours of despair?

Was it not strange that this golden hair was untarnished, when not a bit of the body from whence it had sprung, remained?

It ran through my fingers, caressed my skin with the gentle touch of a dead person. I felt so troubled that I almost wept. I held the braid a long, long time in my hand and it seemed to me as if something of its owner's soul had remained within its meshes. Then I laid it away carefully on the worn velvet, closed the drawer and went out to take a long walk and be alone with my dreams.

I walked a long time, filled with emotion and sadness, the same emotion one feels after a love kiss. It seemed to me as if I had lived before, as if I had known the owner of the golden hair.

When I got home, an irresistible longing came over me to look at the braid. I took it out of the drawer and instantly a long shudder ran through my frame.

For a few days I remained in my usual state of mind, although the thought of the golden braid never left me. Whenever I was home I had to look at it and touch it. I would unlock the drawer with the same emotion I would have felt had it been the door of my beloved's chamber. In my heart and in my hands was a continual, peculiar, sensual yearning to feel the golden flood of this dead hair on my skin. Then, after I had satisfied my longing and had closed the drawer again, I still felt its presence, as if it had been a living, breathing thing imprisoned in the cabinet; I felt its presence and desired it anew; I felt anew the longing

to take it out, to touch it and animate myself through its delightful, cool, silky contact.

A month or two, I don't remember exactly, went by. The braid haunted me; I was happy and tormented at the same time, as if I were expecting the fulfillment of my desires.

I used to lock myself in my room to be alone with it, to feel it on my skin, to bite it, kiss it, roll my face in it. I drowned my lips in it and my eyes, so that the light of day would come to me through its golden mazes.

I loved it, yes, I loved it. I could not live without it, could not remain away from it an hour.

And I waited . . . waited for what? I did not know. For *Her*. One night I awoke with the sensation that somebody was in my room.

Of course, I was alone. But I could not go to sleep again and as I tossed about without finding rest, I got up to look at the braid. It seemed softer to me, more animated than usual. Do the dead return? The kisses I rained upon it almost made me faint with ecstasy and I carried it to bed with me and glued my lips to it as to a beloved mistress.

The dead come back. For *She* came to me. Yes, I saw her, held her, possessed her as she was in this life, tall, blonde, plump, with cool breasts and lyre-shaped hips, and my kisses traveled from her throat to her little feet, following all the divine curves of her body.

Yes, I possessed her every day, every night. She came to me every night, the Beautiful, Adorable, Mysterious, Unknown One.

My happiness was so great that I was unable to conceal it. When I was with her I felt a superhuman bliss, a strange joy at being able to possess the Invisible, the Immaterial, Death Itself, so to speak. No lover ever tasted such ardent, terrible delights!

I was unable to conceal my bliss. I loved her so that I would not go anywhere without her and I took her everywhere with me.

I showed her around town as my wife, I took her to the theaters in private boxes as my mistress.

But they saw her . . . they guessed my secret . . . they tore her from me . . . and they threw me into prison like a malefactor. They took her away from me . . . Oh! misery! . . .

Here the manuscript ended. And just as I looked at the physician with bewildered eyes, a frightful cry, a howl of helpless rage and exasperated desire rang through the asylum.

"Listen to him," said the physician. "We have to give that obscene lunatic a shower bath five times a day. Other men besides Sergeant Bertrand have loved dead women."

Filled with pity, horror and astonishment, I stammered:

"But . . . the braid . . . did it really exist?"

The doctor rose, opened a closet filled with bottles and instruments, and grabbing a braid of blonde hair, flung it across the room to me. It flew into my lap like a golden bird.

I shuddered as I felt its soft, caressing touch on my

hands. And my heart throbbed with disgust and covetousness; with disgust, as when one comes in contact with the accessories of a crime, with covetousness as when one experiences the temptation of something both mysterious and degrading.

The physician shrugged his shoulders and remarked:

"Really, the mind of man is capable of anything!"

NO! mon ami, it cannot be. That which you ask of me is revolting and disgusting. They say that God, (you know that I believe in God,) has spoiled all the good that he has created by joining something horrible with it. He has given us the power of loving, the sweetest joy we have in this world, but He thinks that sentiment is too pure, and too beautiful for us, so he has created the senses — the ignoble senses, which are coarse, revolting and brutal. He has created them as if in derision, contaminating them with all the filth of the body. He has conceived the idea in such a manner that we cannot think of it without a blush of shame, neither can we speak of it, except with lowered voice. The atrocious act is enveloped in shame. It hides itself, it revolts the soul, it wounds the sight, it shames the morals, and is pursued by the law. Never again speak of it to me, never!

I do not know if I still love you, but I know that I am happy when I am near you, and when I see the tender look in your eyes, and hear the beloved tones of your voice, but if, through weakness on my part, you obtained what you desire, from that day you would become odious to me. The delicate chains of friendship which hold us together would be broken. There would be between us an abyss of crime. Let us remain as we are. And . . . love me if you will, I will permit it.

Your friend,

GENEVIEVE.

MADAME:

Will you allow me in turn to speak to you as frankly as you have to me, without polite phrasing. I will speak just as plainly and unreservedly as I would to a friend who takes his eternal vows.

I also do not know if I love you. I could not really know until after that which revolts you so much has happened.

Have you forgotten the lines by Musset:

Je me souviens encor de ces spasmes terribles,
De ces baisers muets, de ces muscles ardents,
De cet être absorbé, blême et serrant les dents.
S'ils ne sont pas divins, ces moments sont horribles.

This sensation of horror and insuperable disgust, we also experience when we are carried away by the heat of passion, and we let ourselves be mated at hazard. But when a woman is for us the being of our choice, a creature of continued charm, of infinite seduction as you are for me, the caress then becomes the most fervent, the most perfect, the most infinite happiness.

The caress, madame, is the test of love. When our passion diminishes after the embrace, we have deceived ourselves, but when it increases, *then* we know that we love.

A philosopher, who does not practice these doctrines, has put us on our guard against the snare of nature.

"Nature craves beings," he says, "and to impel us to create them, she has mingled the double enticement of love and voluptuousness in the snare." "And," he adds, "from the moment we give ourselves up to our passions, as soon as the sweet madness of the em-

brace has passed, a profound sadness falls upon us, we see, we feel and we know the veiled and secret reason which has impelled us in spite of ourselves."

This is often true,— very often indeed, and it is then that we experience the feeling of disgust. Nature has vanquished our passions, she has thrown us at her will into the arms that opened to receive us, because she decreed that arms should open.

Yes! I know the cold and violent kisses on strange lips, the fixed and ardent look in eyes that one has never seen before, and will never see again, and all that which I cannot here say, all which leaves in the soul a bitter, bitter melancholy. But when this cloud of affection that we call love has enveloped two beings, when they have thought of each other constantly, for a long time, when during an absence they are forever in the mind, by day and by night, and the sweet souvenir brings to the soul the features of the beloved face, the smile, and the sound of the voice, when in thought they have possessed the absent one, is it not natural then that at least we open our arms to each other, that our lips meet and that our bodies blend.

Have you never had the desire to be kissed? Tell me, if lips do not call to other lips, and if a look cannot excite furious and unrestrainable passions. Assuredly, *there* is the snare, the impure snare, you will say. What does that matter? I know it, I love it, and I will fall into the snare. Nature teaches us to caress, but hides her ruse, which is to force us in spite of ourselves to perpetuate the generations. Well then, let us steal caresses from her, make them our own, refine them, change them, idealize them, if you wish; nature deceives us, so let us deceive the treacherous one in

our turn. Let us do more than she would have us do, more than she would dare to teach us. Let the caress be like a precious metal, brought out roughly from the earth, we will take it, and work at it, until it is wrought to perfection, without giving thought to the original design, or of the concealed caprices of him whom you call God. And if our thoughts can poetize all things, let us poetize the caress, madame, even to its most terrible brutalities, its most ingenious contrivances, and its most prodigious devices. Madame, let us love the delicious caress like the strong wine which intoxicates, like the ripe fruit which sweetens the mouth, like all happiness which penetrates the body. Let us love flesh, because flesh is beautiful, because it is white, and firm, and smooth, and soft, and exquisite to the lips and hands. When our artists sought for the rarest, and the purest form for the quaffing bowl — wherein Art could drink to inebreity, what did they choose? They chose a woman's rounded bosom of which the flower resembles that of the rose. I once read in an erudite book, entitled the Dictionary of Medical Science this definition of the bosoms, which, they say, was originated by Joseph Prudhomme, who is now a doctor of medicine: "A woman's breasts can be considered as an object that is created for a twofold purpose, that of utility and that of pleasure." If you wish we will pass by that of utility, and speak only of the charm. Would it have its exquisite form, whose call for a caress is irresistible, if it were only destined to give nourishment to the little ones?

Madame, let us leave it to the moralists to preach modesty to us, and let the doctors give us prudent advice, let the poets — the deceivers who deceive them-

selves — sing of the chaste union of souls and of incorporeal happiness; let us leave the homely women to their duties, and the rational men to their useless work, the lay brethren to their doctrines, the priests to their commandments, but *we* will love above all else the caress which intoxicates, maddens, enervates, exhausts and revives, which is sweeter than perfume, lighter than the breeze, more acute than wounds, quick and devouring, which forces a prayer, a cry, a tear, a sigh, and which can impel us to commit any crime, or any act of courage. Let us adore it, not in a tranquil, normal, or legal manner, but violently, furiously, immoderately. Let us search for it as we search for gold and diamonds, for it is of greater value, being inestimable and transient. Pursue it without ceasing, die for it and by it. And if you wish, madame, I will tell you a truth which you will not find, I believe, in any book,— the only happy women on earth are those who are loved with this intensity, who do not *want* for caresses. They live without care, without torturing thoughts, with only one desire,— the desire for the next kiss which will be as sweet and as satisfying as the last. The others — those to whom the caress is circumspect, incomplete or rare, their lives are tormented by a thousand restless, disquieting thoughts, by the love of gold, the love of self-conceit, by all the events which in time become griefs. But women who are caressed to satiety have need of nothing, desire nothing, regret nothing. They live in a tranquil and happy dream, scarcely aware of what would be to others, irreparable disasters, for the caress replaces all, cures all, consoles all.

I have still so much more to tell you.

HENRI.

These two letters written on Japanese paper of rice straw, were found in a little Russian leather pocketbook, under a praying desk in the Madeleine Church on Sunday morning after the one o'clock mass, by

MAUFRIGNEUSE.

FEAR

IN the darkness of the night the train rushed onward at express speed. The compartment in which I was seated was stuffy, the cushions reeked with the strong odor of phenol disinfectant. Undoubtedly this train of the P. L. M. had come from Marseilles. Seated opposite to me was an old gentleman who was gazing out of the window; we were the only occupants of the car. The night was suffocating, moonless, without a breath of air, and not a star was visible. The steam from the plunging engine came to us through the open window, and threw into our faces a warm, sluggish breath — oppressive and stifling. We had started from Paris three hours ago and were *en route* for the center of France, but so far, we had seen nothing of the country we had traversed. We were sitting silently by the window when suddenly there appeared before our eyes a fantastic apparition; before a great fire in a wood two men were standing. We saw them for a moment only — two miserable outcasts in tattered garments, crimson in the gleaming light reflected from the roaring fire, their dark, bearded faces turned towards us, and round and about them, like the setting of a drama, the green trees — glimmering with rugged trunks lit up by the fiery reflex of the flames, the verdant foliage, traversed, imbued, and steeped, by the light which crept through it.

We passed, and all became black again. It was a strange, weird vision. What were these two wretches

doing in the forest? Why had they lit a tremendous fire on a sultry, suffocating night?

My traveling companion pulled out his watch and turning to me, remarked: "Sir, it is just midnight. That is a singular thing we have just seen."

I fully agreed with him, and we discussed the subject, trying to solve the mystery. Who could these men be, were they criminals who had waited till midnight to burn the proof of their crime? Were they wizards preparing a philter? It was not likely that anyone would light such a fire in the middle of the night — a sultry summer night — to boil soup. What were they doing then? We could not imagine, it would forever remain a mystery to us.

My companion then began to talk, but I could not glean from his conversation what his profession was. He was an old man, decidedly original, intelligent, and well educated, but he seemed to me to be slightly demented. However, why should I say that, for how can we distinguish between the sane and the insane in this world, where madness is often called genius, and reason is called folly?

"I am glad that I saw that," he remarked, "for I felt for a few minutes a weird sensation. Do you not think that it must have been very exciting in the olden times when all was so mysterious? In proportion, as we lift the veil from the unknown, so do we take from the imagination of man. Tell me, do you not think that the nights are empty and the blackness of night is ordinary and vulgar now that we no longer have apparitions? We have no more strange beliefs, we do not believe in the fantastical. Why? Because all that was inexplicable is now explicable. The supernatural ebbs

away like a lake that is drained by a canal; does not science from day to day extend the limits of the marvelous? I must tell you, Sir, that I belong to an old race, who liked to hold to certain beliefs — a simple race who did not seek to fathom the mysteries of life; they did not comprehend, neither did they wish to comprehend. They would have refused the simple and plain truth. Yes! We have taken away from the imagination of man in suppressing the invisible. The world to-day seems to me like an abandoned sphere — empty and bare; the beliefs which rendered it poetical have all vanished. When I go out at night I wish I could shudder with the fright that makes old women cross themselves as they walk quickly by the cemetery, and run away and hide when queer vapors arise from the swamps, and when they see the fantastic will-o'-the-wisp. I wish I could believe in that *something* so vague and terrifying, which they imagine passes close to them at dusk. In olden times, the obscurity of the night was sombre and menacing, fabulous beings, prowlers and evil-doers groped about in the dark, their forms could not be distinguished, but the fear of them froze the marrow in the bones, their occult power passed the limits of our thoughts. With the vanishing of the belief in the supernatural, actual terror has also disappeared, for really we experience only real terror for things which we do not understand. Visible dangers can agitate, trouble, and alarm us, but is that fear compared with the convulsions conveyed to the soul by the certainty that we shall meet a ghost, that we see it gliding towards us, and that we shall soon be locked in the deadly embrace of a wandering phantom? The shades of nights do not seem to me to be dark

now that they are no longer haunted. Here is a proof of what I say — if we suddenly found ourselves alone in the woods, we should be pursued by the image of the two strange beings who appeared before us in the blood red light of their fire, far more than by a fear of some known or real danger." He repeated, "We experience real terror only for the things which we do not understand."

A story that Tourgueneff related to a party of us one Sunday when we were at Gustave Flaubert's home, came to my mind as my companion finished speaking. I do not know if the celebrated Russian author has ever written about it. No one knew how to make the fear of the veiled unknown pass through the soul better than Tourgueneff. In the half light of a strange story, he would give us a glimpse into a world of alarming, uncertain, and menacing things; he would make us feel strongly that vague fear of the Invisible, that fear of the Unknown that is at the back of us — behind the door, behind the walls, back of the apparent life. He would suddenly traverse our spirits with dubious lights which lit up only enough to increase our fear. He would show us the significance of strange coincidences, the unexpected unison of circumstances as though by accident, but that was guided by a hidden and cunning power. He would make us feel as though an imperceptible chain was pulling us across the abyss of life, as though we were in a cloudy dream, the meaning of which unceasingly escaped us. He did not enter boldly into the realms of the supernatural like Edgar Allan Poe or Hoffman, he related simple tales in which vague and weird things crept through. I remember on that particular Sunday of which I speak

he also made the same remark as my traveling companion, that "we experience real terror only for the things which we do not understand."

He was seated in a capacious lounging chair, his arms hanging down by his side, his legs stretched out limply before him. His head was covered with thick locks of silvery hair, and his long white beard gave him the aspect of a patriarch or of a River of Ovid. He spoke slowly, with a certain indolence which gave an added charm to his phrases, and there was a certain quaver in his deep voice which accentuated the meaning of his words. His eyes were bright and wide open, and, like the eyes of a child, they reflected the emotions of his thoughts. He related the following adventure to us:

One day in his early youth he was out shooting in a forest in Russia. The whole day long he had walked about the woods, and towards the end of the afternoon he threw himself down on the banks of a river, thoroughly exhausted. With masses of floating weeds the river glided calmly on under the trees — clear, cool and deep. An intense desire to throw himself into the transparent water seized him; in a moment he had thrown off his clothes and leaped into the stream. He was a tall and very strong youth, a vigorous and hardy swimmer. For some time he gently drifted on, touching lightly the floating weeds. All was peaceful and calm. He liked to feel the gentle contact of the rushes against his flesh. Suddenly a hand was placed on his shoulder, he turned with a start, and faced a hideous creature, who gazed at him with eager intentness. It bore partly the resemblance to a woman and partly to a gorilla.

She had an enormous face, wrinkled and puckered, and as she looked at him, she grinned and made grimaces all the time. Two nameless things, which were meant for her breasts floated before her. The hair which surrounded her face and floated on her back, was inordinately long, and tangled, and scorched by the sun. Tourgueneff was seized with a ghastly terror, the icy fear of the supernatural; without reflecting, without settled purpose or understanding, he began to swim desperately towards the shore, but the monster swam after him and came up quickly beside him; she stretched her hand and touched his neck, his back, his legs; at each touch she gave a little gurgle of delight. The youth swam on frantically until he reached the shore, then he darted up the steep bank of the river and rushed headlong through the dense wood, without stopping to pick up his clothes and his gun. The hideous creature followed him, and caught up to him, she ran along by his side, keeping up the same speed and grunting all the time. The fugitive at last exhausted and paralyzed from terror, slackened his pace, and was going to fall down, when a little boy who was minding some goats ran quickly towards them, armed with a horsewhip. The child commenced to lash the creature without mercy until she turned and fled, uttering loud cries of pain. Tourgueneff watched her disappear in the dense foliage of the wood, with the mincing step and spring of the gorilla.

The little goat-herd then told the frightened youth that she was a poor mad woman who had lived in the woods for thirty years. The peasants gave her what little they could spare; the greater part of her time she spent swimming in the river. When the great

writer concluded his story he told us that nothing in his life had ever terrified him so much, because he did not *understand* what the monster was.

My companion had listened attentively. "It is true," he said, "one has only absolute terror for that which one does not understand. We can really experience the awful convulsions of the soul which we call terror, only when there is mingled with the fright a superstitious fear. I once felt this terror in all its horror. It was for something that was so simple and stupid that I scarcely like to tell you about it:

"I was on a walking tour in Brittany. I was alone. I had traversed Finistère and tramped miles through lonely parts, across uncultivated soil where only the wild furze grew, beside the huge sacred stones, which the peasants believed were haunted. The day preceding I had explored the sinister Pointe du Raz, that bit of the old world where the two seas — the Atlantic and the Channel combat for eternity. My mind was full of legends, of stories that I had read or had heard on the subject of beliefs and superstitions. I was on my way from Penmarch to Pont-l'Abbé at night. Do you know Penmarch? No! Well, the seashore is flat, quite flat, and low: it almost seems as though it were lower than the sea. On all sides is the broad expanse of the ocean, grayish and menacing; you can see huge slimy rocks which seem to have the form of wild beasts.

"I had dined in a little wineshop that was frequented by fishermen; as soon as I had finished my meal I started on my journey, taking the right of the road which lay between two high lands. The night was very dark. As I passed the druidical stones, which looked like

phantoms lowering above me, it seemed as though they turned to look at me, and little by little a vague, unreasonable fear possessed me. Fear of what! I could not tell, it was a nameless fear that was creeping slowly upon me. There are nights when one can almost feel the light touch of spirits, when the soul is chilled without reason, and the heart beats quickly under a confused uneasiness.

"The road was long — interminably long and empty. Except for the roaring of the sea which lay behind me, there was not a sound; sometimes the dreary and menacing noise seemed to be so near that I thought the water must be upon me, and I was seized with a desire to fly, to run from it at full speed. A low wind began to blow in squalls, it made the wild furze shake and softly hiss around me. I thought I would quicken my step for I was cold — deadly cold, a mortal chill of terror penetrated my body. Ah! If I could have met some human being! It was now so dark, that it was difficult for me to see the road before me. Suddenly I heard in the distance which stretched beyond, a rumbling noise. A carriage, I thought. I listened for a moment, but the noise had ceased, I could hear nothing but the sound of the waves. A minute passed and I heard again a rolling noise, but much nearer. I could not see any lights coming towards me, this struck me as being very strange. How could any one drive through this desolate and wild country without lanterns? I listened again, all was silent, the rolling had stopped, and then it came on again. It could not be a cart or a heavy vehicle, the noise was too light, and how was it I could not hear the horses' hoofs? I began to wonder at that. What could it be? it came

towards me quickly, with increasing speed, but still I could hear only the rolling, no sound of hoofs or of feet — nothing. What could it be? it was quite near to me now, it was almost upon me. With a feeling of instinctive fear I leaped aside into the ditch and then there passed before my startled eyes a large wheelbarrow — *alone*. There was no one pushing it. It went on and on, at a great rate along the dark road. My heart beat so violently that I sank down among the weeds and listened to the rumbling as it died away in the distance, it was going on towards the sea. I could not move, I could not walk, for I knew that if it had returned and followed me I should have died of terror.

" It was a long time before I gained sufficient courage to continue my journey; I walked along the rest of the road with such fear at my heart, that the slightest sound made me shake and hold my breath. You will say it was foolish, but I was *afraid*.

" In thinking it over later, when I had fully regained my composure, I solved the mystery. Without the slightest doubt a bare-footed small child was guiding it, and I was looking for the head of a man at an ordinary height. In a measure you can understand what I felt. My mind had been dwelling on things supernatural, and along comes a barrow which was rolling onward with no visible hand to guide it. '*Quelle horreur!*"

He remained in deep thought for a few minutes then he continued:

" I tell you, Sir. There is a terrible and menacing danger near us at this very moment. This invasion of the cholera, the odor of phenol with which these cars

are infected, cries out that the germs are here among us — somewhere.

"If we were to see Toulon now, we should know well that *It* — the Terror was stalking about in the midst of the people. It is not the fear of an illness which has made them crazy. The cholera is another thing, it is the Invisible, it is a plague of by-gone ages, a species of Evil Spirit which returns to us, and which fills us with wonder as much as with fear — it *belongs* to the past. I laugh at doctors when they talk of their microbes. It is not an insect that would inspire a man with such terror, that he would leap from his window and be dashed into pieces below. It is the cholera, the indescribable and ghastly Being who comes to us from the far East. If you go through Toulon, you will see the people dancing in the streets. Why do they dance when Death is in their midst? In the suburbs of the town you will see them lighting bonfires, and sending off fireworks, while bands of musicians play joyous airs in the public parks and promenades. Why this frenzied madness? It is because It is there, they are defying It, not the Microbe, but the Cholera. They put it at defiance and bluster and swagger as they would at an enemy who lies in ambush: it is for It that they dance and laugh and shriek, that they light the bonfires, and play the gayest music, it is for the Fiend who kills, and whom we feel is present everywhere, invisible, menacing like the Evil Beings who were charmed away by the ancient barbarous priests . . ."

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